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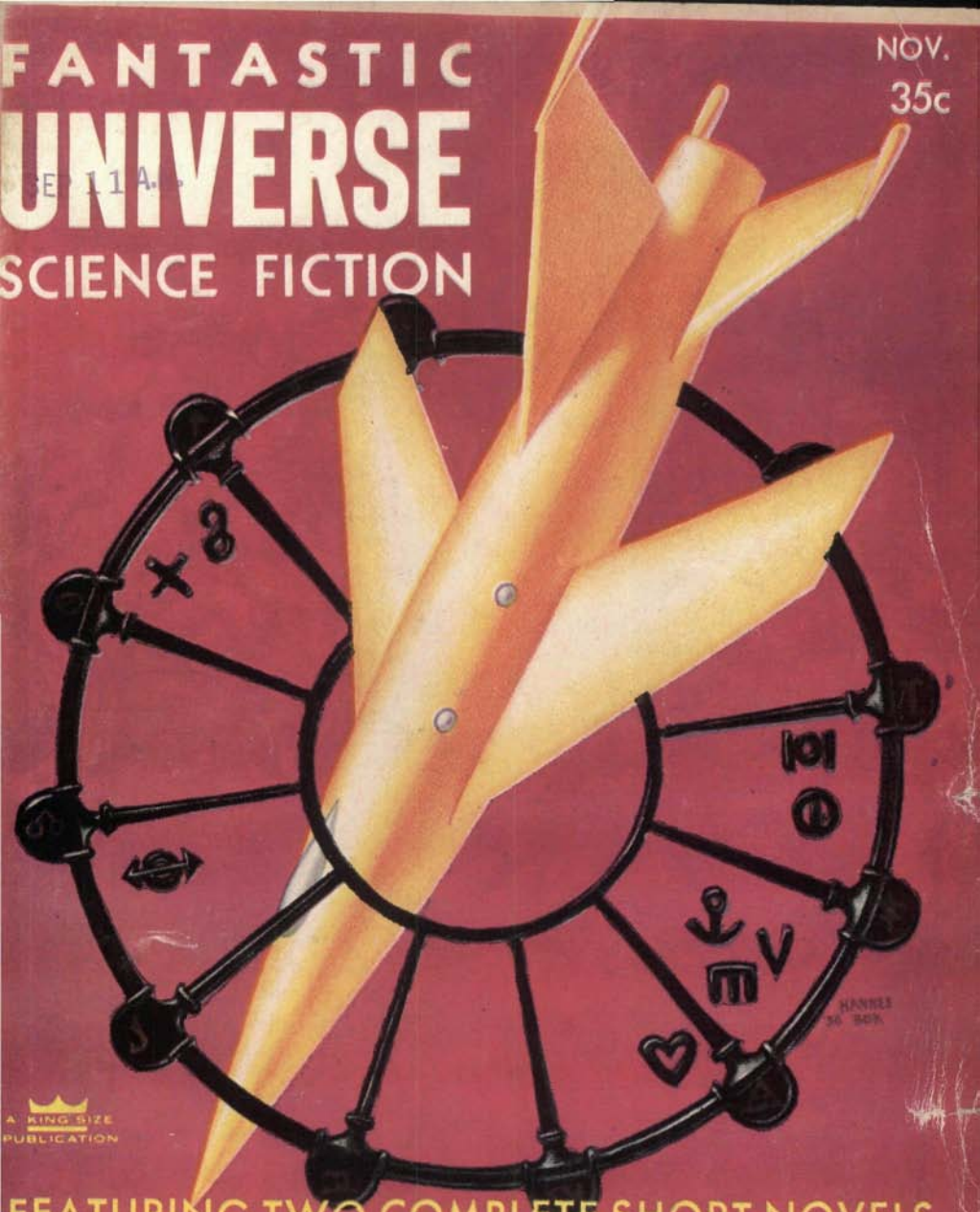

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CONQUEST OVER TIME by MICHAEL SHAARA

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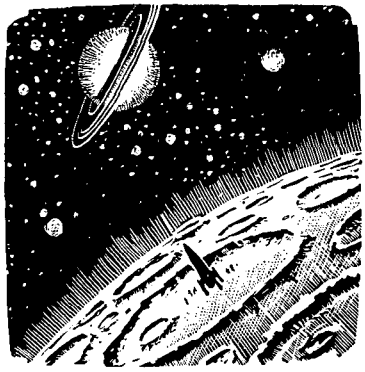

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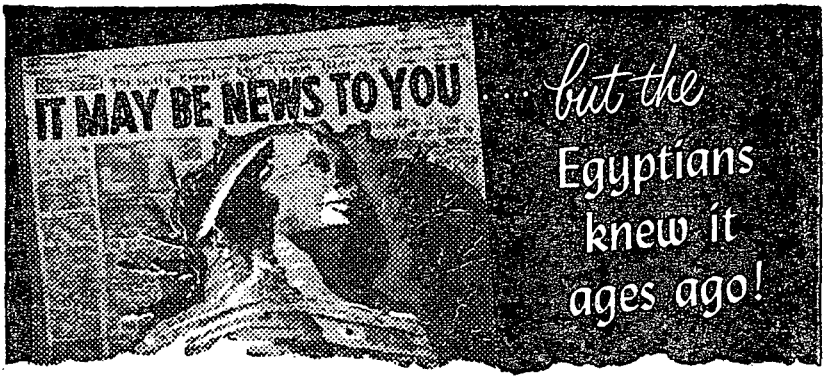

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exile from space

by . . . Judith Merril

Who was this strange girl who had been born in this place—and still it wasn't her home?...

I DON'T know where they got the car. We made three or four stops before the last one, and they must have picked it up one of those times. Anyhow, they got it, but they had to make a license plate, because it had the wrong kind on it.

They made me some clothes, too—a skirt and blouse and shoes that looked just like the ones we saw on television. They couldn't make me a lipstick or any of those things, because there was no way to figure out just what the chemical composition was. And they decided I'd be as well off without any driver's license or automobile registration as I would be with papers that weren't exactly perfect, so they didn't bother about making those either.

They were worried about what to do with my hair, and even thought about cutting it short, so it would look more like the women on television, but that was one time I was way ahead of them. I'd seen more shows than anyone else, of course—I watched them almost every minute, from the time they told me I was going—and there was one where I'd seen a way to make braids and put them around the top of your head. It wasn't very

"They" worried about the impression she'd make. Who could imagine that she'd fall in love, passionately, the way others of her blood must have done!

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comfortable, but I practiced at it until it looked pretty good.

They made me a purse, too. It didn't have anything in it except the diamonds, but the women we saw always seemed to carry them, and they thought it might be a sort of superstition or ritual necessity, and that we'd better not take a chance on violating anything like that.

They made me spend a lot of time practicing with the car, because without a license, I couldn't take a chance on getting into any trouble. I must have put in the better part of an hour starting and stopping and backing that thing, and turning it around, and weaving through trees and rocks, before they were satisfied.

Then, all of a sudden, there was nothing left to do except *go*. They made me repeat everything one more time, about selling the diamonds, and how to register at the hotel, and what to do if I got into trouble, and how to get in touch with them when I wanted to come back. Then they said good-bye, and made me promise not to stay *too* long, and said they'd keep in touch the best they could. And then I got in the car, and drove down the hill into town.

I knew they didn't want to let me go. They were worried, maybe even a little afraid I wouldn't want to come back, but mostly worried that I might say something I shouldn't, or run into some difficulties they hadn't anticipated. And outside of that, they knew they were going to miss me. Yet they'd made up their minds to it; they planned it this way, and they felt it was the right thing to do, and certainly they'd put an awful lot of thought and effort and preparation into it.

If it hadn't been for that, I might have turned back at the last minute. Maybe they were worried; but *I* was petrified. Only of course, I wanted to go, really. I couldn't help being curious, and it never occurred to me then that I might miss them. It was the first time I'd ever been out on my own, and they'd promised me, for years and years, as far back as I could remember, that some day I'd go back, like this, by myself. But . . .

Going back, when you've been away long enough, is not so much a homecoming as a dream *deja vu*. And for me, at least, the dream was not entirely a happy one. Everything I saw or heard or touched had a sense of haunting familiarity, and yet of *wrongness,* too—almost a nightmare feeling of the oppressively inevitable sequence of events, of faces and features and events just not-quite-remembered and not-quite-known.

I was born in this place, but it was not my home. Its people were not mine; its ways were not mine. All I knew of it was what I had been told, and what I had seen for myself these last weeks of preparation, on the television screen. And the dream-feeling was intensified,

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at first, by the fact that I did not know *why* I was there. I knew it had been planned this way, and I had been told it was necessary to complete my education. Certainly I was aware of the great effort that had been made to make the trip possible. But I did not yet understand just *why*.

Perhaps it was just that I had heard and watched and thought and dreamed too much about this place, and now I was actually there, the reality was—not so much a disappointment as—just sort of *unreal*. Different from what I knew when I *didn't* know.

The road unwound in a spreading spiral down the mountainside. Each time I came round, I could see the city below, closer and larger, and less distinct. From the top, with the sunlight sparkling on it, it had been a clean and gleaming pattern of human civilization. Halfway down, the symmetry was lost, and the smudge and smoke began to show.

Halfway down, too, I began to pass places of business: restaurants and gas stations and handicraft shops. I wanted to stop. For half an hour now I had been out on my own, and I still hadn't seen any of the people, except the three who had passed me behind the wheels of their cars, going up the road. One of the shops had a big sign on it, "COME IN AND LOOK AROUND." But I kept going. One thing I understood was that it was absolutely necessary to have money, and that I must stop nowhere, and attempt nothing, till after I had gotten some.

Farther down, the houses began coming closer together, and then the road stopped winding around, and became almost straight. By that time, I was used to the car, and didn't have to think about it much, and for a little while I really enjoyed myself. I could see into the houses sometimes, through the windows, and at one, a woman was opening the door, coming out with a broom in her hand. There were children playing in the yards. There were cars of all kinds parked around the houses, and I saw dogs and a couple of horses, and once a whole flock of chickens.

But just where it was beginning to get really interesting, when I was coming into the little town before the city, I had to stop watching it all, because there were too many other people driving. That was when I began to understand all the fuss about licenses and tests and traffic regulations. Watching it on television, it wasn't anything like being in the middle of it!

Of course, what I ran into there was really nothing; I found that out when I got into the city itself. But just at first, it seemed pretty bad. And I still don't understand it. These people are pretty bright mechanically. You'd think anybody who could *build* an automobile—let alone an atom bomb—could *drive* one easily enough. Especially with a lifetime to learn in. Maybe

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they just like to live dangerously . . .

It was a good thing, though, that I'd already started watching out for what the other drivers were doing when I hit my first red light. That was something I'd overlooked entirely, watching street scenes on the screen, and I guess they'd never noticed either. They must have taken it for granted, the way I did, that people stopped their cars out of courtesy from time to time to let the others go by. As it was, I stopped because the others did, and just happened to notice that they began again when the light changed to green. It's really a very good system; I don't see why they don't have them at all the intersections.

From the first light, it was eight miles into the center of Colorado Springs. A sign on the road said so, and I was irrationally pleased when the speedometer on the car confirmed it. Proud, I suppose, that these natives from my own birthplace were such good gadgeteers. The road was better after that, too, and the cars didn't dart in and out off the sidestreets the way they had before. There was more traffic on the highway, but most of them behaved fairly intelligently. Until we got into town, that is. After that, it was everybody-for-himself, but by then I was prepared for it.

I found a place to park the car near a drugstore. That was the first thing I was supposed to do. Find a drugstore, where there would likely be a telephone directory, and go in and look up the address of a hock shop. I had a little trouble parking the car in the space they had marked off, but I could see from the way the others were stationed that you were supposed to get in between the white lines, with the front of the car next to the post on the sidewalk. I didn't know what the post was for, unitl I got out and read what it said, and then I didn't know what to do, because I didn't *have* any money. Not yet. And I didn't dare get into any trouble that might end up with a policeman asking to see my license, which always seemed to be the first thing they did on television, when they talked to anybody who was driving a car. I got back in the car and wriggled my way out of the hole between the other cars, and tried to think what to do. Then I remembered seeing a sign that said "Free Parking" somewhere, not too far away, and went back the way I'd come.

There was a sort of park, with a fountain spraying water all over the grass, and a big building opposite, and the white lines here were much more sensible. They were painted in diagonal strips, so you could get in and out quite easily, without all that backing and twisting and turning. I left the car there, and remembered to take the keys with me, and started walking back to the drugstore.

That was when it hit me.

Up to then, beginning I guess

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when I drove that little stretch coming into Manitou, with the houses on the hills, and the children and yards and dogs and chickens, I'd begun to feel almost as if I belonged here. The people seemed so *much* like me—as long as I wasn't right up against them. From a little distance, you'd think there was no difference at all. Then, I guess, when I was close enough to notice, driving through town, I'd been too much preoccupied with the car. It didn't really get to me till I got out and started walking.

They were all so *big* . . .

They were big, and their faces and noses and even the pores of their skin were too big. And their voices were too loud. And they *smelled*.

I didn't notice that last much till I got into the drugstore. Then I thought I was going to suffocate, and I had a kind of squeezing upside-down feeling in my stomach and diaphragm and throat, which I didn't realize till later was what they meant by "being sick." I stood over the directory rack, pretending to read, but really just struggling with my insides, and a man came along and shouted in my ear something that sounded like, "Vvvm trubbb lll-lll-lll ay-dee?" (I didn't get that sorted out for hours afterwards, but I don't think I'll ever forget just the way it sounded at the time. Of course, he meant, "Having trouble, little lady?") But all I knew at the time was he was too big and smelled of all kinds of things that were unfamiliar and slightly sickening. I couldn't answer him. All I could do was turn away so as not to breathe him, and try to pretend I knew what I was doing with the directory. Then he hissed at me ("Sorry, no offense," I figured out later), and said clearly enough so I could understand even then, "Just trying to help," and walked away.

As soon as he was gone, I walked out myself. Directory or no directory, I had to get out of that store. I went back to where I'd left the car, but instead of getting in it, I sat down on a bench in the park, and waited till the turmoil inside me began to quiet down.

I went back into that drugstore once before I left, purposely, just to see if I could pin down what it was that had bothered me so much, because I never reacted that strongly afterwards, and I wondered if maybe it was just that it was the first time I was inside one of their buildings. But it was more than that; that place was a regular snake-pit of a treatment for a stranger, believe me! They had a tobacco counter, and a lunch counter and a perfume-and-toiletries section, and a nut-roasting machine, and just to top it off, in the back of the store, an open-to-look-at (*and* smell) pharmaceutical center! Everything, all mixed together, and compounded with stale human sweat, which was also new to me at the time. And no air conditioning.

Most of the air conditioning

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they have is bad enough on its own, with chemical smells, but those are comparatively easy to get used to . . . and I'll take them *any* time, over what I got in that first dose of *Odeur d'Earth.*

Anyhow, I sat on the park bench about fifteen minutes, I guess, letting the sun and fresh air seep in, and trying to tabulate and memorize as many of the components of that drugstore smell as I could, for future reference. I was simply going to have to adjust to them, and next time I wanted to be prepared.

All the same, I didn't feel prepared to go back into the same place. Maybe another store wouldn't be quite as bad. I started walking in the opposite direction, staying on the wide main street, where all the big stores seemed to be, and two blocks down, I ran into luck, because there was a big bracket sticking out over the sidewalk from the front of a store halfway down a side street, and it had the three gold balls hanging from it that I knew, from television, meant the kind of place I wanted. When I walked down to it, I saw too that they had a sign painted over the window: "We buy old gold and diamonds."

Just *how* lucky that was, I didn't realize till quite some time later. I was going to look in the Classified Directory for "Hock Shops." I didn't know any other name for them then.

Inside, it looked exactly like what I expected, and even the smell was nothing to complain about. Camphor and dust and mustiness were strong enough to cover most of the sweaty smell, and those were smells of a kind I'd experienced before, in other places.

The whole procedure was reassuring, because it all went just the way it was supposed to, and I knew how to behave. I'd seen it in a show, and the man behind the grilled window even *looked* like the man on the screen, and talked the same way.

"What can we do for you, girlie?"

"I'd like to sell a diamond," I told him.

He didn't say anything at first, then he looked impatient. "You got it with you?"

"Oh . . . yes!" I opened my purse, and took out one of the little packages, and unwrapped it, and handed it to him. He screwed the lens into his eye, and walked back from the window and put it on a little scale, and turned back and unscrewed the lens and looked at me.

"Where'd you get this, lady?" he asked me.

"It's mine," I said. I knew just how to do it. We'd gone over this half a dozen times before I left, and he was behaving exactly the way we'd expected.

"I don't know," he said. "Can't do much with an unset stone like this . . ." He pursed his lips, tossed

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the diamond carelessly in his hand, and then pushed it back at me across the counter. I had to keep myself from smiling. It was just the way they'd said it would be. The people here were still in the Mech Age, of course, and not nearly conscious enough to communicate anything at all complex or abstract any way except verbally. But there is nothing abstract about avarice, and between what I'd been told to expect, and what I could feel pouring out of him, I knew precisely what was going on in his mind.

"You mean you don't *want* it?" I said. "I thought it was worth quite a lot . . ."

"Might have been once." He shrugged. "You can't do much with a stone like that any more. Where'd you get it, girlie?"

"My mother gave it to me. A long time ago. I wouldn't sell it, except . . . Look," I said, and didn't have to work hard to sound desperate, because in a way I was. "Look, it must be worth *something*?"

He picked it up again. "Well . . . what do you want for it?"

That went on for quite a while. I knew what it was supposed to be worth, of course, but I didn't hope to get even half of that. He offered seventy dollars, and I asked for five hundred, and after a while he gave me three-fifty, and I felt I'd done pretty well—for a greenhorn. I put the money in my purse, and went back to the car, and on the way I saw a policeman, so I stopped and asked him about a hotel. He looked me up and down, and started asking questions about how old I was, and what was my name and where did I live, and I began to realize that being so much smaller than the other people was going to make life complicated. I told him I'd come to visit my brother in the Academy, and he smiled, and said, "Your *brother,* is it?" Then he told me the name of a place just outside of town, near the Academy. It wasn't a hotel; it was a *mo*tel, which I didn't know about at that time, but he said I'd be better off there. A lot of what he said went right over my head at the time; later I realized what he meant about "a nice respectable couple" running the place. I found out later on, too, that he called them up to ask them to keep an eye on me; he thought I was a nice girl, but he was worried about my being alone there.

By this time, I was getting hungry, but I thought I'd better go and arrange about a place to stay first. I found the motel without much trouble, and went in and registered; I knew how to do that, at least—I'd seen it plenty of times. They gave me a key, and the man who ran the place asked me did I want any help with my bags.

"Oh, no," I said. "No, thanks. I haven't got much."

I'd forgotten all about that, and they'd never thought about it either! These people always have

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a lot of different clothes, not just one set, and you're supposed to have a suitcase full of things when you go to stay anyplace. I said I was hungry anyway, and wanted to go get something to eat, and do a couple of other things—I didn't say what—before I got settled. So the woman walked over with me, and showed me which cabin it was, and asked was everything all right?

It looked all right to me. The room had a big bed in it, with sheets and a blanket and pillows and a bedspread, just like the ones I'd seen on television. And there was a chest of drawers, and a table with more small drawers in it, and two chairs and a mirror and one door that went into a closet and one that led to the bathroom. The fixtures in there were a little different from the ones they'd made for me to practice in, but functionally they seemed about the same.

I didn't look for any difficulty with anything there except the bed, and that wasn't *her* fault, so I assured her everything was just fine, and let her show me how to operate the gas-burner that was set in the wall for heat. Then we went out, and she very carefully locked the door, and handed me the key.

"You better keep that door locked," she said, just a little sharply. "You never know . . ."

I wanted to ask her *what* you never know, but had the impression that it was something *everybody* was supposed to know, so I just nodded and agreed instead.

"You want to get some lunch," she said then, "there's a place down the road isn't too bad. Clean, anyhow, and they don't cater too much to those . . . well, it's clean." She pointed the way; you could see the sign from where we were standing. I thanked her, and started the car, and decided I might as well go there as anyplace else, especially since I could see she was watching to find out whether I did or not.

These people are all too big. Or almost all of them. But the man behind the counter at the diner was enormous. He was tall and fat with a beefy red face and large open pores and a fleshy mound of a nose. I didn't like to look at him, and when he talked, he boomed so loud I could hardly understand him. On top of all that, the smell in that place was awful: not quite as bad as the drugstore, but some ways similar to it. I kept my eyes on the menu, which was full of unfamiliar words, and tried to remember that I was hungry.

The man was shouting at me—or it was more like growling, I guess—and I couldn't make out the words at first. He said it again; and I sorted out syllables and matched them with the words on the card, and then I got it:

"Goulash is nice today, miss . . ."

I didn't know what goulash was, and the state my stomach was in, with the smells, I decided I'd better play safe, and ordered a glass of milk, and some vegetable soup.

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The milk had a strange taste to it. Not *bad*—just *different*. But of course, this came from cows. That was all right. But the vegetable soup . . . !

It was quite literally putrid, made as near as I could figure out from dead animal juices, in which vegetables had been soaked and cooked till any trace of flavor or nourishment was entirely removed. I took one taste of that, and then I realized what the really nauseating part of the odor was, in the diner and the drugstore both. It was rotten meat, dead for some time, and then heated in preparation for eating.

The crackers that came with the soup were good; they had a nice salty tang. I ordered more of those, with another glass of milk, and sat back sipping slowly, trying to adjust to that smell, now that I realized I'd probably find it anywhere I could find food.

After a while, I got my insides enough in order so that I could look around a little and see the place, and the other people in it. That was when I turned around and saw Larry sitting next to me.

He was beautiful. He *is* beautiful. I know that's not what you're supposed to say about a man, and he wouldn't like it, but I can only say what I see, and of course that's partly a matter of my own training and my own feelings about myself.

At home on the ship, I always wanted to cut off my hair, because it was so black, and my skin was so white, and they didn't go together. But they wouldn't let me; they liked it that way, I guess, but *I* didn't. No child wants to feel like a freak, and nobody else had hair like that, or dead-white colorless skin, either.

Then, when I went down there, and saw all the humans, I was still a freak because I was so small.

Larry's small, too. Almost as small as I am. And he's all one color. He has hair, of course, but it's so light, and his skin is so dark (both from the sun, I found out), that he looks just about the same lovely golden color all over. Or at least as much of him as showed when I saw him that time, in the diner.

He was beautiful, and he was my size, and he didn't have ugly rough skin or big heavy hands. I stared at him, and I felt like grabbing on to him to make sure he didn't get away.

After a while I realized my mouth was half-open, and I was still holding a cracker, and I remembered that this was very bad manners. I put the cracker down and closed my mouth. He smiled. I didn't know if he was laughing at the odd way I was acting, or just being friendly, but I smiled back anyhow.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I mean, hello. How do you do, and I'm sorry if I startled you. I shouldn't have been staring."

"*You*," I said, and meant to finish, *You were staring?* But he

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went right on talking, so that I couldn't finish.

"I don't know what else you can expect, if you go around looking like that," he said.

"I'm sorry . . ." I started again.

"And you should be," he said sternly. "Anybody who walks into a place like this in the middle of a day like this looking the way you do has got to expect to get stared at a little."

The thing is, I wasn't used to the language; not used *enough*. I could communicate all right, and even understand some jokes, and I knew the spoken language, not some formal unusable version, because I learned it mostly watching those shows on the television screen. But I got confused this time, because "looking" means two different things, active and passive, and I was thinking about how I'd been *looking at* him, and . . .

That was my lucky day. I didn't want him to be angry at me, and the way I saw it, he was perfectly justified in scolding me, which is what I thought he was doing. But I *knew* he wasn't really angry; I'd have felt it if he was. So I said, "You're right. It was very rude of me, and I don't blame you for being annoyed. I won't do it any more."

He started laughing, and this time I knew it was friendly. Like I said, that was my lucky day; *he* thought I was being witty. And, from what he's told me since, I guess he realized then that *I* felt friendly too, because before that he'd just been bluffing it out, not knowing how to get to know me, and afraid *I'd* be sore at *him,* just for talking to me!

Which goes to show that sometimes you're better off not being *too* familiar with the local customs.

The trouble was there were too many things I didn't know, too many small ways to trip myself up. Things they couldn't have foreseen, or if they did, couldn't have done much about. All it took was a little caution and a lot of alertness, plus one big important item: staying in the background—not getting to know any one person too well—not giving any single individual a chance to observe too much about me.

But Larry didn't mean to let me do that. And . . . I didn't want him to.

He asked questions; I tried to answer them. I did know enough at least of the conventions to realize that I didn't have to give detailed answers, or could, at any point, act offended at being questioned so much. I *didn't* know enough to realize that reluctance or irritation on my part wouldn't have made him go away. We sat on those stools at the diner for most of an hour, talking, and after a little while I found I could keep the conversation on safer ground by asking *him* about himself, and about the country thereabouts. He seemed to enjoy talking.

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Eventually, he had to go back to work. As near as I could make out, he was a test-pilot, or something like it, for a small experimental aircraft plant near the city. He lived not too far from where I was staying, and he wanted to see me that evening.

I hadn't told him where the motel was, and I had at least enough caution left not to tell him, even then. I did agree to meet him at the diner, but for lunch the next day again, instead of that evening. For one thing, I had a lot to do; and for another, I'd seen enough on television shows to know that an evening date was likely to be pretty long-drawn-out, and I wasn't sure I could stand up under that much close scrutiny. I had some studying-up to do first. But the lunch-date was fine; the thought of not seeing him at all was terrifying—as if he were an old friend in a world full of strangers. That was how I felt, that first time, maybe just because he was almost as small as I. But I think it was more than that, really.

I drove downtown again, and found a store that seemed to sell all kinds of clothing for women. Then when I got inside, I didn't know where to start, or what to get. I thought of just buying one of everything, so as to fill up a suitcase; the things I had on seemed to be perfectly satisfactory for actual *wearing* purposes. They were quite remarkably—when you stopped to think of it—similar to what most of the women I'd seen that day were wearing, and of course they weren't subject to the same problems of dirtying and wrinkling and such as the clothes in the store were.

I walked around for a while, trying to figure out what all the different items, shapes, sizes, and colors, were for. Some racks and counters had signs, but most of them were unfamiliar words like *brunchies,* or *Bermudas* or *scuffs;* or else they seemed to be mislabeled, like *dusters* for a sort of button-down dress, and *Postage Stamp Girdles* at one section of a long counter devoted to "Foundation Garments." For half an hour or so, I wandered around in there, shaking my head every time a saleswoman came up to me, because I didn't know, and couldn't figure out, what to ask for, or how to ask for it.

The thing was, I didn't dare draw too much attention to myself by doing or saying the wrong things. I'd have to find out more about clothes, somehow, before I could do much buying.

I went out, and on the same block I found a show-window full of suitcases. That was easy. I went in and pointed to one I liked, and paid for it, and walked out with it, feeling a little braver. After all, nobody had to know there was nothing in it. On the corner, I saw some books displayed in the window of a drug store. It took all

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the courage I had to go in there, after my first trip into one that looked very much like it, but I wanted a dictionary. This place didn't smell quite so strong; I suppose the pharmacy was enclosed in back, and I don't believe it had a lunch counter. Anyhow, I got in and out quickly, and walked back to the car, and sat down with the dictionary.

It turned out to be entirely useless, at least as far as *brunchies* and *Bermudas* were concerned. It had "scuff, v.," with a definition; "v.," I found out, meant *verb,* so that wasn't the word I wanted, but when I remembered the slippers on the counter with the sign, it made sense in a way.

Not enough sense, though. I decided to forget about the clothes for a while. The next problem was a driver's license.

The policeman that morning had been helpful, if over-interested, and since policemen directed traffic, they ought to have the information I wanted. I found one of them standing on a streetcorner looking not too busy, and asked him, and if his hair hadn't been brown instead of reddish (and only half there) I'd have thought it was the same one I talked to before. He wanted to know how old I was, and where was I from, and what I was doing there, and did I have a car, and was I *sure* I was nineteen?

Well, of course, I wasn't sure, but they'd told me that by the local reckoning, that was my approximate age. And I almost slipped and said I *had* a car, until I realized that I didn't have a right to drive one till I had a license. After he asked that one question, I began to feel suspicious about everything else he asked, and the interest he expressed. He was helpful, but I had to remember too, that it was the police who were charged with watching for suspicious characters, and —well, it was the last time I asked a policeman for information.

He *did* tell me where I could rent a car to take my road test, though, and where to apply for the test. The Courthouse turned out to be the big building behind the square where I'd parked the car that morning, and arranging for the test turned out to be much simpler than, by then, I expected it to be. In a way, I suppose, all the questions I had to answer when I talked to the policeman had prepared me for the official session—though they didn't seem nearly so inquisitive there.

By this time, I'd come to expect that they wouldn't believe my age when I told them. The woman at the window behind the counter wanted to see a "birth certificate," and I produced the one piece of identification I had; an ancient and yellowed document they had kept for me all these years. From the information it contained, I suspected it might even *be* a birth certificate; whether or not, it apparently satisfied her, and after that all she

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wanted was things like my address and height and weight. Fortunately, they had taken the trouble, back on the ship, to determine these statistics for me, because things like that were always coming up on television shows, especially when people were being questioned by the police. For the address, of course, I used the motel. The rest I knew, and I guess we had the figures close enough to right so that at least the woman didn't question any of it.

I had my road test about half an hour later, in a rented car, and the examiner said I did very well. He seemed surprised, and I don't wonder, considering the way most of those people contrive to mismanage a simple mechanism like an automobile. I guess when they say Earth is still in the Mechanical Age, what they mean is that humans are just *learning* about machines.

The biggest single stroke of luck I had at any time came during that road test. We passed a public-looking building with a sign in front that I didn't understand.

"What's that place?" I asked the examiner, and he said, as if anyone would know what he meant, "That? Oh—the Library."

I looked it up in my dictionary as soon as I was done at the License Bureau, and when I found out what it was, everything became a great deal simpler.

There was a woman who worked there, who showed me, without any surprise at my ignorance, just how the card catalogue worked, and what the numbering system meant; she didn't ask me how old I was, or any other questions, or demand any proof of any kind to convince her I had a right to use the place. She didn't even bother me much with questions about what I was looking for. I told her there were a *lot* of things I wanted to know, and she seemed to think that was a good answer, and said if she could help me any way, not to hesitate to ask, and then she left me alone with those drawers and drawers full of letter-and-number keys to all the mysteries of an alien world.

I found a book on how to outfit your daughter for college, that started with underwear and worked its way through to jewelry and cosmetics. I also found a whole shelf full of law books, and in one of them, specific information about the motor vehicle regulations in different States. There was a wonderful book about diamonds and other precious stones, particularly fascinating because it went into the chemistry of the different stones, and gave me the best measuring-stick I found at any time to judge the general level of technology of that so-called Mechanical Age.

That was all I had time for, I couldn't believe it was so late, when the librarian came and told me they were closing up, and I guess my

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disappointment must have showed all over me, because she asked if I wouldn't like to have a card, so I could take books home?

I found out all I needed to get a card was identification. I was supposed to have a reference, too, but the woman said she thought perhaps it would be all right without one, in my case. And then, when I wanted to take a volume of the Encyclopedia Americana, she said they didn't usually circulate that, but if I thought I could bring it back within a day or two . . .

I promised to, and I never did, and out of everything that happened, that's the one thing I feel badly about. I think she must have been a very unusual and *good* sort of woman, and I wish I had kept my promise to her.

Some of the stores downtown were still open. I bought the things I'd be expected to have, as near as I could make out from the book on college girls: panties and a garter belt and a brassiere, and stockings. A slip and another blouse, and a coat, because even in the early evening it was beginning to get chilly. Then the salesgirl talked me into gloves and a scarf and some earrings. I was halfway back to the car when I remembered about night clothes, and went back for a gown and robe and slippers. That didn't begin to complete the college girls' list, but it seemed like a good start. I'd need a dress, too, I thought, if I ever did go out with Larry in the evening . . . but that could wait.

I put everything into the suitcase, and drove back to the motel. On the way, I stopped at a food store, and bought a large container of milk, and some crackers, and some fruit—oranges and bananas and apples. Back in my room, I put everything away in the drawers, and then sat down with my book and my food, and had a wonderful time. I was hungry, and everything tasted good, away from the dead meat smells, and what with clothes in the drawers and everything, I was beginning to feel like a real Earth-girl.

I even took a bath in the bathroom.

A good long one. Next to the library, that's the thing I miss most. It would be even better, if they made the tubs bigger, so you could swim around some. But just getting wet all over like that, and splashing in the water, is fun. Of course, we could never spare enough water for that on the ship.

Altogether, it was a good evening; everything was fine until I tried to sleep in that bed. I felt as if I was being suffocated all over. The floor was almost as bad, but in a different way. And once I got to sleep, I guess I slept well enough, because I felt fine in the morning. But then, I think I must have been on a mild oxygen jag all the time I was down there; nothing seemed to bother me too much. That morning, I felt so good

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I worked up my courage to go into a restaurant again—a different one. The smell was beginning to be familiar, and I could manage better. I experimented with a cereal called oatmeal, which was delicious, then I went back to the motel, packed up all my new belongings, left the key on the desk—as instructed by the sign on the door—and started out for Denver.

Denver, according to the Encyclopedia Americana, is more of a true metropolitan area than Colorado Springs; that means—on Earth—that it is dirtier, more crowded, far less pleasant to look at or live in, and a great deal more convenient and efficient to do business in. In Denver, and with the aid of a Colorado driver's license for casual identification, I was able to sell two of my larger diamonds fairly quickly, at two different places, for something approximating half of their full value. Then I parked the car they had given me on a side street, took my suitcase, coat, and book with me, and walked to the nearest car sales lot. I left the keys in the old car, for the convenience of anyone who might want it.

Everything went extraordinarily smoothly, with just one exception. I had found out everything I needed to know in that library, except that when dealing with humans, one must always allow for waste time. If I had realized that at the time I left Colorado Springs that morning, everything might have turned out very differently indeed—although when I try to think just what other way it *could* have turned out, I don't quite know . . . and I wonder, too, how much they knew, or planned, before they sent me down there . . .

This much is sure: if I hadn't assumed that a 70-mile trip, with a 60-mile average speed limit, would take approximately an hour and a half, and if I had realized that buying an automobile was not the same simple process as buying a nightgown, I wouldn't have been late for my luncheon appointment. And if I'd been there on time, I'd never have made the date for that night. As it was, I started out at seven o'clock in the morning, and only by exceeding the speed limit on the last twenty miles of the return trip did I manage to pull into that diner parking space at five minutes before two.

His car was still there!

It is so easy to look back and spot the instant of recognition or of error. My relief when I saw his car . . . my delight when I walked in and saw and *felt* his mixture of surprise and joy that I had come, with disappointment and frustration because it was so late, and he had to leave almost immediately. And my complete failure, in the midst of the complexities of these inter-reactions, to think logically, or to recognize that his ordinary perceptions were certainly the equivalent of my own . . .

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At that moment, I wasn't thinking *about* any of these things. I spent a delirious sort of five minute period absorbing his feelings about me, and releasing my own at him. I hadn't planned to do it, not so soon, not till I knew much more than I did—perhaps after another week's reading and going about—but when he said that since I'd got there so late for lunch, I'd *have* to meet him for dinner, I found I agreed with him perfectly.

That afternoon, I bought a dress. This, too, took a great deal of time, even more than the car, because in the one case I simply had to look at a number of component parts, and listen to the operation of the motor, and feel for the total response of the mechanism, to determine whether it was suitable or not—but in the other, I had nothing to guide me but my own untrained taste, and the dubious preferences of the salesgirl, plus what I *thought* Larry's reactions *might* be. Also, I had to determine, without seeming too ignorant, just what sort of dress might be suitable for a dinner date—and without knowing for sure just how elaborate Larry's plans for the evening might be.

I learned a lot, and was startled to find that I enjoyed myself tremendously. But I couldn't make up my mind, and bought three dresses instead of one. It was after that, emboldened by p l e a s u r e and success, that I went back to that first drugstore. The Encyclopedia volume I had taken from the library, besides containing the information I wanted on Colorado, had an article on Cosmetics. I decided powder was unnecessary, although I could understand easily enough how important it must be to the native women, with their thick skin and large pores and patchy coloring; that accounted for the fact that the men were mostly so much uglier . . . and I wondered if Larry used it, and if that was why his skin looked so much better than the others'.

Most of the perfumes made me literally ill; a few were inoffensive or mildly pleasant, if you thought of them just as smells, and not as something to be mistaken for one's *own* smell. Apparently, though, from the amount of space given over to them on the counter, and the number of advertisements I had seen or heard for one brand or another, they were an essential item. I picked out a faint lavender scent, and then bought some lipstick, mascara, and eyebrow pencil. On these last purchases, it was a relief to find that I had no opportunity to display my ignorance aboute nuances of coloring, or the merits of one brand over another. The woman behind the counter knew exactly what I should have, and was not interested in hearing any of my opinions. She even told me how to apply the mascara, which was helpful, since the other two were obvious, and anyhow I'd seen them used on television, and

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the lipstick especially I had seen women use since I'd been here.

It turned out to be a little more difficult than it looked, when I tried it. Cosmetics apparently take a good deal more experience than clothing, if you want to have it look *right*. Right by *their* standards, I mean, so that your face becomes a formal design, and will register only a minimum of actual emotion or response.

I was supposed to meet Larry in the cocktail lounge of a hotel in Manitou Springs, the smaller town I'd passed through the day before on my way down from the mountain. I drove back that way now, with all my possessions in my new car, including the purse that held not only my remaining diamonds and birth certificate, but also a car registration, driver's license, wallet, money, and makeup. A little more than halfway there, I saw a motel with a "Vacancy" sign out, and an attractive clean look about it. I pulled in and got myself a room with no more concern than if I'd been doing that sort of thing all my life.

This time there was no question about my age, nor was there later on that evening, in the cocktail lounge or anywhere else. I suppose it was the lipstick that made the difference, plus a certain increase in self-confidence; apparently I wasn't too small to be an adult, provided I looked and acted like one.

The new room did not have a bathtub. There was a shower, which was fun, but not as much as the tub had been. Dressing was *not* fun, and when I was finished, the whole effect still didn't look right, in terms of my own mental image of an Earth-woman dressed for a date.

It was the shoes, of course. This kind of dress wanted high heels. I had tried a pair in the store, and promptly rejected the whole notion. Now I wondered if I'd been too hasty, but I realized I could not conceivably have added that discomfort to the already-pressing difficulties of stockings and garter belt.

This last problem got so acute when I sat down and tried to drive the car, that I did some thinking about it, and decided to take them off. It seemed to me that I'd seen a lot of bare legs with flat heels. It was only with high heels that stockings were a real necessity. Anyhow, I pulled the car over to the side on an empty stretch of road, and wriggled out of things with a great deal of difficulty. I don't believe it made much difference in my appearance. No one *seemed* to notice, and I do think the lack of heels was more important.

All of this has been easy to put down. The next part is harder: partly because it's so important; partly because it's personal; partly because I just don't remember it all as clearly.

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Larry was waiting for me when I got to the hotel. He stood up and walked over to me, looking at me as if I were the only person in the room besides himself, or as if he'd been waiting all his life, and only just that moment saw what it was he'd been waiting for. I don't know how I looked at him, but I know how I felt all of a sudden, and I don't think I can express it very well.

It was odd, because of the barriers to communication. The way he felt and the way I did are not things to put into words, and although I couldn't help but feel the impact of *his* emotion, I had to remember that he was deaf-and-blind to mine. All I could get from him for that matter, was a sort of generalized *noise*, loud but confused, without any features or details.

He smiled, and I smiled, and he said, "I didn't know if you'd really come . . ." and I said, "Am I late?" and he said, "Not much. What do you want to drink?"

I knew he meant something with alcohol in it, and I didn't dare, not till I'd experimented all alone first.

"Could I get some orange juice?" I asked.

He smiled again. "You can get anything you want. You don't drink?" He took my arm, and walked me over to a booth in the back corner, and went on without giving me a chance to answer. "No, of course you don't. Just orange juice and milk. Listen, Tina, I've been scared to ask you, but we might as well get it over with. How old are you anyhow? . . ." We sat down, but he still didn't give me a chance to answer. "No, that's not the right question. Who are you? What are you? What makes a girl like you exist at all? How come they let you run around on your own like this? Does your mother . . . Never mind me, honey. I've got no business asking anything. Sufficient unto the moment, and all that. I'm just talking so much because I'm so nervous. I haven't felt like this since . . . since I first went up for a solo in a Piper Cub. I didn't think you'd come, and you did, and you're still here in spite of me and my dumb yap. "Orange juice for the lady, please," he told the waiter, "and a beer for me. Draft."

I just sat there. As long as he kept talking, I didn't have to. He looked just as beautiful as he had in the diner, only maybe more so. His skin was smoother; I suppose he'd just shaved. And he was wearing a tan suit just a shade darker than his skin, which was just a shade darker than his hair, and there was absolutely nothing I could say out loud in his language that would mean anything at all, so I waited to see if he'd start talking again.

"You're not mad at me, Tina?"

I smiled and shook my head.

"Well, *say* something then."

"It's more fun listening to you."

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"You say that just like you mean it . . . or do you mean *funny*?"

"No. I mean that it's hard for me to talk much. I don't know how to say a lot of the things I want to say. And most people don't say anything when they talk, and I don't like listening to their voices, but I do like yours, and . . . I can't help liking what you say . . . it's always so *nice*. About me, I mean. Complimentary. Flattering."

"You were right the first time. And you seem to be able to say what you mean very clearly."

Which was just the trouble. Not only able to, but unable not to. It didn't take any special planning or remembering to say or act the necessary lies to other humans. But Larry was the least alien person I'd ever known. Dishonesty to him was like lying to myself. Playing a role for him was pure schizophrenia.

Right then, I knew it was a mistake. I should never have made that date, or at least not nearly so soon. But even as I thought that, I had no more intention of cutting it short or backing out than I did of going back to the ship the next day. I just tried not to talk too much, and trusted to the certain knowledge that I was as important to him as he was to me—so perhaps whatever mistakes I made, whatever I said that sounded *wrong*, he would either accept or ignore or forgive.

But of course you can't just sit all night and say nothing. And the simplest things could trip me up. Like when he asked if I'd like to dance, and all I had to say was "No, thanks," and instead, because I *wanted* to try it, I said, "I don't know how."

Or when he said something about going to a movie, and I agreed enthusiastically, and he gave me a choice of three different ones that he wanted to see . . . "Oh, anyone," I told him. "You're easy to please," he said, but he insisted on my making a choice. There was something he called "an old-Astaire-Rogers," and something else that was made in England, and one current American one with stars I'd seen on television. I wanted to see either of the others. I could have said so, or I could have named one, any one. Instead I heard myself blurting out that I'd never been to a movie.

At that point, of course, he began to ask questions in earnest. And at that point, schizoid or not, I had to lie. It was easier, though, because I'd been thoroughly briefed in my story, for just such emergencies as this—and because I could talk more or less uninterruptedly, with only pertinent questions thrown in, and without having to react so much to the emotional tensions between us.

I told him how my parents had died in an automobile accident when I was a baby; how my two uncles had claimed me at the hospital; about the old house up on the mountainside, and the convent school, and the two old men who

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hated the evils of the world; about the death of the first uncle, and at long last the death of the second, and the lawyers and the will and everything—the whole story, as we'd worked it out back on the ship.

It answered everything, explained everything—even the unexpected item of not being able to eat meat. My uncles were vegetarians, which was certainly a harmless eccentricity compared to most of the others I credited them with.

As a story, it was pretty far-fetched, but it hung together—and in certain ways, it wasn't even *too* far removed from the truth. It was, anyhow, the closest thing to the truth that I could tell—and I therefore delivered it with a fair degree of conviction. Of course it wasn't designed to stand up to the close and personal inspection Larry gave it; but then he *wanted* to believe me.

He seemed to swallow it. What he did, of course, was something any man who relies, as he did, on his reflexes and responses to stay alive, learns to do very early—he filed all questions and apparent discrepancies for reference, or for thinking over when there was time, and proceeded to make the most of the current situation.

We both made the most of it. It was a wonderful evening, from that point on. We went to the Astaire-Rogers picture, and although I missed a lot of the humor, since it was contemporary stuff from a time before I had any chance to learn about Earth, the music and dancing were fun. Later on, I found that dancing was not nearly as difficult or intricate as it looked—at least not with Larry. All I had to do was give in to a natural impulse to let my body follow his. It felt wonderful, from the feet on up.

Finally, we went back to the hotel, where we'd left my car, and I started to get out of his, but he reached out an arm, and stopped me.

"There's something else I guess you never did," he said. His voice sounded different from before. He put both his hands on my shoulders, and pulled me toward him, and leaned over and kissed me.

I'd seen it, of course, on television.

I'd seen it, but I had no idea . . .

That first time, it was something I felt on my lips, and felt so sweetly and so strongly that the rest of me seemed to melt away entirely. I had no other sensations, except in that one place where his mouth touched mine. That was the first time.

When it stopped, the world stopped, and I began again, but I had to sort out the parts and pieces and put them all together to find out who I was. While I did this, his hands were still on my shoulders, where they'd been all along, only he was holding me at arm's distance away from him, and looking at me curiously.

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"It really was, wasn't it?" he said.

"What?" I tried to say, but the sound didn't come out. I took a breath and "Was what?" I croaked.

"The first time." He smiled suddenly, and it was like the sun coming up in the morning, and then his arms went all the way around me. I don't know whether he moved over on the seat, or I did, or both of us. "Oh, baby, baby," he whispered in my ear, and then there was the second time.

The second time was like the first, and also like dancing, and some ways like the bathtub. This time none of me melted away; it was all there, and all close to him, and all warm, and all tingling with sensations. I was more completely alive right then than I had ever been before in my life.

After we stopped kissing each other, we stayed very still, holding on to each other, for a while, and then he moved away just a little, enough to breathe better.

I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to get out of the car. I didn't even want to be separated from him by the two or three inches between us on the seat. But he was sitting next to me now, staring straight ahead, not saying anything, and I just didn't know what came next. On television, the kiss was always the end of the scene.

He started the car again.

I said, "I have to . . . my car . . . I . . ."

"We'll come back," he said. "Don't worry about it. We'll come back. Let's just drive a little . . . ?" he pulled out past my car, and turned and looked at me for a minute. "You don't want to go now, do you? Right away?"

I shook my head, but he wasn't looking at me any more, so I took a breath and said out loud, "No."

We came off a twisty street onto the highway. "So that's how it hits you," he said. He wasn't exactly talking to me; more like thinking out loud. "Twenty-seven years a cool cat, and now it has to be a crazy little midget that gets to you." He had to stop then, for a red light—the same light I'd stopped at the first time on the way in. That seemed a long long time before.

Larry turned around and took my hand. He looked hard at my face, "I'm sorry, hon. I didn't mean that the way it sounded."

"What?" I said. "What do you mean?" I hadn't even tried to make sense out of what he was saying before; he wasn't talking to me anyhow.

"Kid," he said, "maybe that was the first time for you, but in a different way it was the first time for me too." His hand opened and closed around mine, and his mouth opened and closed too, but nothing came out. The light was green; he noticed, and started moving, but it turned red again. This time he kept watching it.

"I don't suppose anybody ever

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told you about the birds and the bees and the butterflies," he said.

"Told me *what* about them?" He didn't answer right away, so I thought about it. "All I can think of is they all have wings. They all fly."

"So do I. So does a fly. What I mean is . . . the hell with it!" He turned off the highway, and we went up a short hill and through a sort of gateway between two enormous rocks. "Have you ever been here?" he asked.

"I don't think so . . ."

"They call it The Garden of the Gods. I don't know why. I like it here . . . it's a good place to drive and think."

There was a lot of moonlight, and the Garden was all hills and drops and winding roads between low-growing brush, and everywhere, as if the creatures of some giant planet had dropped them, were those towering rocks, their shapes scooped out and chiseled and hollowed and twisted by wind, water and sand. Yes, it was lovely, and it was non-intrusive. Just what he said—a good place to drive and think.

Once he came to the top of a hill, and stopped the car, and we looked out over the Garden, spreading out in every direction, with the moonlight shadowed in the sagebrush, and gleaming off the great rocks. Then we turned and looked at each other, and he reached out for me and kissed me again; after which he pulled away as if the touch of me hurt him, and grabbed hold of the wheel with a savage look on his face, and raced the motor, and raised a cloud of dust on the road behind us.

I didn't understand, and I felt hurt. I wanted to stop again. I wanted to be kissed again. I didn't like sitting alone on my side of the seat, with that growl in his throat not quite coming out.

I asked him to stop again. He shook his head, and made believe to smile.

"I'll buy you a book," he said. "All about the birds and the bees and a little thing we have around here we call sex. I'll buy it tomorrow, and you can read it—you *do* know how to read, don't you?—and then we'll take another ride, and we can park if you want to. Not tonight, baby."

"But I *know* . . ." I started, and then had sense enough to stop. I knew about sex; but what I knew about it didn't connect with kissing or parking the car, or sitting close . . . and it occurred to me that maybe it did, and maybe there was a lot I *didn't* know that wasn't on Television, and wasn't on the Ship's reference tapes either. Morals and mores, and nuances of behavior. So I shut up, and let him take me back to the hotel again, to my own car.

He leaned past me to open the door on my side, but he couldn't quite make it, and I had my fourth kiss. Then he let go again, and almost pushed me out of the car;

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but when I started to close the door behind me, he called out, "Tomorrow night?"

"I . . . all right," I said. "Yes. Tomorrow night."

"Can I pick you up?"

There was no reason not to this time. The first time I wouldn't tell him where I lived, because I knew I'd have to change places, and I didn't know where yet. I told him the name of the motel, and where it was.

"Six o'clock," he said.

"All right."

"Good night."

"Good night."

I don't remember driving back to my room. I think I slept on the bed that night, without ever stopping to determine whether it was comfortable or not. And when I woke up in the morning, and looked out the window at a white-coated landscape, the miracle of snow (which I had never seen before; not many planets have as much water vapor in their atmospheres as Earth does.) in summer weather seemed trivial in comparison to what had happened to me.

Trivial, but beautiful. I was afraid it would be very cold, but it wasn't.

I had gathered, from the weather-talk in the place where I ate breakfast, that in this mountain-country (it was considered to be very high altitude there), snow at night and hot sun in the afternoon was not infrequent in the month of April, though it was unusual for May.

It was beautiful to look at, and nice to walk on, but it began melting as soon as the sun was properly up, and then it looked awful. The red dirt there is pretty, and so is the snow, but when they began merging into each other in patches and muddy spots, it was downright ugly.

Not that I cared. I ate oatmeal and drank milk and nibbled at a piece of toast, and tried to plan my activities for the day. To the library first, and take back the book they'd lent me. Book . . . all right then, get a book on sex. But that was foolish; I *knew* all about sex. At least I knew . . . well, what did I know? I knew their manner of reproduction, and . . .

Just why, at that time and place, I should have let it come through to me, I don't know. I'd managed to stay in a golden daze from the time in the Garden till that moment, refusing to think through the implications of what Larry said.

Sex. Sex is mating and reproduction. Dating and dancing and kissing are parts of the courtship procedure. And the television shows all stop with kissing, because the mating itself is taboo. Very simple. Also *very* taboo.

Of course, they didn't *say* I couldn't. They never said anything about it at all. It was just obvious. It wouldn't even work. We were *different*, after all.

Oh, technically, biologically, of

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course, we were probably cross-fertile, but . . .

The whole thing was so obviously *impossible!*

They should have warned me. I'd never have let it go this far, if I'd known.

Sex. Mating. Marriage. Tribal rites. Rituals and rigamaroles, and stay here forever. Never go back.

Never go back?

There was an instant's sheer terror, and then the comforting knowledge that they wouldn't *let* me do that. I had to go back.

Baby on a spaceship?

Well, *I* was a baby on a spaceship, but that was different. How different? I was older. I wasn't born there. Getting born is complicated. Oxygen, gravity, things like that. You can't raise a *human* baby on a spaceship . . . *Human?* What's human? What am I? Never mind the labels. It would be *my* baby . . .

I didn't want a baby. I just wanted Larry to hold me close to him and kiss me.

I drove downtown and on the way to the library I passed a bookstore, so I stopped and went in there instead. That was better. I could buy what I wanted, and not have to ask permission to take it out, and if there was more than one, I could have all I wanted.

I asked the man for books about sex. He looked so startled, I realized the taboo must apply on the verbal level too.

I didn't care. He showed me where the books were, and that's all that mattered. "Non-fiction here," he said. "That what you wanted, Miss?"

Non-fiction. Definitely. I thanked him, and picked out half a dozen different books. One was a survey of sexual behavior and morals; another was a manual of techniques; one was on the psychology of sex, and there was another about abnormal sex, and one on physiology, and just to play safe, considering the state of my own ignorance, one that announced itself as giving a "clear simple explanation of the facts of life for adolescents."

I took them all to the counter, and paid for them, and the man still looked startled, but he took the money. He insisted on wrapping them up, though, before I could leave.

The next part of this is really Larry's story, but unable as I am, even now, to be *certain* about his unspoken thoughts, I can only tell it as I experienced it. I didn't do anything all that day, except wade through the books I'd bought, piece-meal, reading a few pages here and a chapter there. The more I read, the more confused I got. Each writer contradicted all the others, except in regard to the few basic biological facts that I already knew. The only real addition to my factual knowledge was the information in the manual of technique about contraception—and that was

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rather shocking, even while it was tempting.

The mechanical contrivances these people made use of were foolish, of course, and typical of the stage of culture they are going through. If I wanted to prevent conception, while engaging in an act of sexual intercourse, I could do so, of course, but . . .

The shock to the glandular system wouldn't be too severe; it was the psychological repercussions I was thinking about. The idea of pursuing a course of action whose sole motivation was the procreative urge, and simultaneously to decide by an act of will to refuse to procreate . . .

I *could* do it, theoretically, but in practice I knew I never would.

I put the book down and went outside in the afternoon sunshine. The motel was run by a young married couple, and I watched the woman come out and put her baby in the playpen. She was laughing and talking to it; she looked happy; so did the baby.

But *I* wouldn't be. Not even if they let me. I couldn't live here and bring up a child—children?—on this primitive, almost barbaric, world. Never ever be able fully to communicate with anyone. Never, ever, be entirely honest with anyone.

Then I remembered what it was like to be in Larry's arms, and wondered what kind of communication I could want that might surpass that. Then I went inside and took a shower and began to dress for the evening.

It was too early to get dressed. I was ready too soon. I went out and got in the car, and pulled out onto the highway and started driving. I was halfway up the mountain before I knew where I was going, and then I doubled my speed.

I was scared. I ran away.

There was still some snow on the mountain top. Down below, it would be warm yet, but up there it was cold. The big empty house was full of dust and chill and I brought fear in with me. I wished I had known where I was going when I left my room; I wanted my coat. I wanted something to read while I waited. I remembered the library book and almost went back. Instead, I went to the dark room in back that had once been somebody's kitchen, and opened the cupboard and found the projector and yelled for help.

I didn't know where they were, how far away, whether cruising or landed somewhere, or how long it would take. All I could be sure of was that they couldn't come till after dark, full dark, and that would be, on the mountain top, at least another four hours.

There was a big round black stove in a front room, that looked as if it could burn wood safely. I went out and gathered up everything I could find nearby that looked to be combustible, and started a fire, and began to feel better.

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I beat the dust off a big soft chair, and pulled it over close to the stove, and curled up in it, warm and drowsy and knowing that help was on the way.

I fell asleep, and I was in the car with Larry again, in front of that hotel, every cell of my body tinglingly awake, and I woke up, and moved the chair farther back away from the fire, and watched the sun set through the window—till I fell asleep again, and dreamed again, and when I woke, the sun was gone, but the mountain top was brightly lit. I had forgotten about the moon.

I tried to remember what time it rose and when it set, but all I knew was it had shone as bright last night in the Garden of the Gods.

I walked around, and went outside, and got more wood, and when it was hot in the room again, I fell asleep, and Larry's hands were on my shoulders, but he wasn't kissing me.

He was shouting at me. He sounded furious, but I couldn't feel any anger. "You God-damn little idiot!" he shouted. "What in the name of all that's holy . . . ? . . . put you over my knee and . . . For God's sake, baby," he stopped shouting, "what did you pull a dumb trick like this for?"

"I was scared. I didn't even plan to do it. I just did."

"Scared? My God, I should think you would be! Now listen, babe. I don't know yet what's going on, and I don't think I'm going to like it when I find out. I don't like it already that you told me a pack of lies last night. Just the same, God help me, I don't think it's what it sounds like. But I'm the only one who doesn't. Now you better give it to me straight, because they've got half the security personnel of this entire area out hunting for you, and nobody else is going to care much what the truth is. My God, on top of everything else, you had to *run away!* Now, give out, kid, and make it good. This one has got to stick."

I didn't understand a lot of what he said. I started trying to explain, but he wouldn't listen. He wanted something else, and I didn't know what.

Finally, he made me understand.

He'd almost believed my story the night before. Almost, but there was a detail somewhere that bothered him. He couldn't remember it at first; it kept nudging around the edge of his mind, but he didn't know what it was. He forgot about it for a while. Then, in the Garden, I made my second big mistake. (He didn't explain all of this then; he just accused, and I didn't understand this part completely until later.) I wanted him to park the car.

Any girl on Earth, no matter how sheltered, how inexperienced, would have known better than that. As he saw it, he had to decide whether I was just so carried away by the night and the mood and

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the moment that I didn't *care*—or whether my apparent innocence was a pose all along.

When we separated in front of the hotel that night, we both had to take the same road for a while. Larry was driving right behind me for a good three miles, before I turned off at the motel. And that was when he realized what the detail was that had been bothering him: my car.

The first time he saw me, I was driving a different make and model, with Massachusetts plates on it. He was sure of that, because he had copied it down when he left the luncheonette, the first time we met.

Larry had never told me very clearly about the kind of work he did. I knew it was something more or less "classified," having to do with aircraft—jet planes or experimental rockets, or something like that. And I knew, without his telling me, that the work—not just the *job,* but the work he did at it—was more important to him than anything else ever had been. More important, certainly, than he had ever expected any woman to be.

So, naturally, when he met me that day, and knew he wanted to see me again, but couldn't get my address or any other identifying information out of me, he had copied down the license number of my car, and turned it in, with my name, to the Security Officer on the Project. A man who has spent almost every waking moment from the age of nine planning and preparing to fit himself for a role in humanity's first big fling into space doesn't endanger his security status by risking involuntary contamination from an attractive girl. The little aircraft plant on the fringes of town was actually a top-secret key division in the Satellite project, and if you worked there, you took precautions.

The second time I met him at the luncheonette, he had been waiting so long, and had so nearly given up any hope of my coming, that he was no longer watching the road or the door when I finally got there—and when he left, he was so pleased at having gotten a dinner date with me, that he didn't notice much of anything at all. Not except out of the corner of one eye, and with only the slightest edge of subconscious recognition: just enough so that some niggling detail that was out-of-place kept bothering him thereafter; and just enough so that he made a point of stopping in the Security Office again that afternoon to add my new motel address to the information he'd given them the day before.

The three-mile drive in back of my Colorado plates was just about long enough, finally, to make the discrepancy register consciously.

Larry went home and spent a bad night. His feelings toward me, as I could hardly understand at the time, were a great deal stronger, or at least more clearly defined, than mine about him. But since he

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was more certain just what it was he wanted, and less certain what *I* did, every time he tried to fit my attitude in the car into the rest of what he knew, he'd come up with a different answer, and nine answers out of ten were angry and suspicious and agonizing.

"Now look, babe," he said, "you've got to see this. I trusted *you*; really, all the time, I did trust you. But I didn't trust *me*. By the time I went to work this morning, I was half-nuts. I didn't know *what* to think, that's all. And I finally sold myself on the idea that if you were what you said you were, nobody would get hurt, and—well, if you *weren't* on the level, I better find out, quick. You see that?"

"Yes," I said.

"Okay. So I told them about the license plates, and about—the other stuff."

"What other stuff?" What else was there? How stupid could I be?

"I mean, the—in the car. The way you— Listen, kid," he said, his face grim and demanding again. "It's still just as true as it was then. I *still* don't know. They called me this evening, and said when they got around to the motel to question you, you'd skipped out. They also said that Massachusetts car was stolen. And there were a couple of other things they'd picked up that they wouldn't tell me, but they've got half the National Guard and all the Boy Scouts out after you by now. They wanted me to tell them anything I could think of that might help them find this place. I couldn't think of anything while I was talking to them. Right afterwards, I remembered plenty of things—which roads you were familiar with, and what you'd seen before and what you hadn't, stuff like that, so—"

"So you—?"

"So I came out myself. I wanted to find you first. Listen, babe, I love you. Maybe I'm a sucker, and maybe I'm nuts, and maybe I-don't-know-what. But I figured maybe I could find out more, and easier on you, than they could. And honey, it better be good, because I don't think I've got what it would take to turn you in, and now I've found you—"

He let it go there, but that was plenty. He was willing to listen. He wanted to believe in me, because he wanted me. And finding me in the house I'd described, where I'd said it was, had him half-convinced. But I still had to explain those Massachusetts plates. And I couldn't.

I was psychologically incapable of telling him another lie, now, when I knew I would never see him again, that this was the last time I could ever possibly be close to him in any way. I couldn't estrange myself by lying.

And I was *also* psychologically incapable—I found out—of telling the truth. They'd seen to that.

It was the first time I'd ever hated them. The first time, I sup-

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pose, that I fully realized my position with them.

I could not tell the truth, and I would not tell a lie; all I could do was explain this, and hope he would believe me. I could explain, too, that I was no spy, no enemy; that those who had prevented me from telling what I wanted to tell were no menace to his government or his people.

He believed me.

It was just that simple. He believed me, because I suppose he knew, without knowing how he knew it, that it was truth. Humans are not incapable of communication; they are simply unaware of it.

I told him, also, that they were coming for me, that I had called them, and—regretfully—that he had better leave before they came.

"You said they weren't enemies or criminals. You were telling the truth, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was. They won't *harm* you. But they might . . ." I couldn't say it. I didn't know the words when I tried to say it. *Might take you away with them . . . with us . . .*

"Might what?"

"Might . . . oh, I don't *know*!"

Now he was suspicious again. "All right," he said. "I'll leave. You come with me."

It was just that simple. Go back with him. Let them come and not find me. What could they do? Their own rules would keep them from hunting for me. They couldn't come down among the people of Earth. Go back. Stop running.

We got into his car, and he turned around and smiled at me again, like the other time.

I smiled back, seeing him through a shiny kind of mist which must have been tears. I reached for him, and he reached for me at the same time.

When we let go, he tried to start the car, and it wouldn't work. Of course. I'd forgotten till then. I started laughing and crying at the same time in a sort of a crazy way, and took him back inside and showed him the projector. They'd forgotten to give me any commands about not doing that, I guess. Or they thought it wouldn't matter.

It did matter. Larry looked it over, and puzzled over it a little, and fooled around, and asked me some questions. I didn't have much technical knowledge, but I knew what it did, and he figured out the way it did it. Nothing with an electro-magnetic motor was going to work while that thing was turned on, not within a mile or so in any direction. And there wasn't any way to turn it off. It was a homing beam, and it was on to stay—foolproof.

That was when he looked at me, and said slowly, "You got here three days ago, didn't you, babe?"

I nodded.

"There was— God-damn it, it's too foolish! There was a—a *flying saucer* story in the paper that day. Somebody saw it land on a hilltop somewhere. Some crackpot. Some . . . how about it, kid?"

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I couldn't say yes and I couldn't say no, and I did the only thing that was left, which was to get hysterical. In a big way.

He had to calm me down, of course. And I found out why the television shows stop with the kiss. The rest is very private and personal.

Author's note: This story was dictated to me by a five-year-old boy—word-for-word, except for a very few editorial changes of my own. He is a very charming and bright youngster who plays with my own five-year-old daughter. One day he wandered into my office, and watched me typing for a while, then asked what I was doing. I answered (somewhat irritably, because the children are supposed to stay out of the room when I'm working) that I was trying *to write a story.*

"What kind of a story?"

"A grown-up story."

"But what kind*?"*

"A science-fiction story." The next thing I was going to do was to call my daughter, and ask her to take her company back to the playroom. I had my mouth open, but I never got a syllable out. Teddy was talking.

"I don't know where they got the car," he said. "They made three or four stops before the last . . ." He had a funny look on his face, and his eyes were glazed-looking.

I had seen some experimental work with hypnosis and post-hypnotic performance. After the first couple of sentences, I led Teddy into the living-room, and switched on the tape-recorder. I left it on as long as he kept talking. I had to change tapes once, and missed a few more sentences. When he was done, I asked him, with the tape still running, where he had heard that story.

"What story?" he asked. He looked perfectly normal again.

"The story you just told me."

He was obviously puzzled.

"The science-fiction *story," I said.*

"I don't know where they got the car," he began; his face was set and his eyes were blank.

I kept the tape running, and picked up the parts I'd missed before. Then I sent Teddy off to the playroom, and played back the tape, and thought for a while.

There was a little more, besides what you've read. Parts of it were confused, with some strange words mixed in, and with sentences half-completed, and a feeling of ambivalence or censorship or inhibition of some kind preventing much clarity. Other parts were quite clear. Of these, the only section I have omitted so far that seems to me to belong in the story is this one:—

The baby will have to be born on Earth! They have decided that themselves. And for the first time, I am glad that they cannot communicate with me as perfectly as they do among themselves. I can

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think some things they do not know about.

We are not coming back. I do not think that I will like it on Earth for very long, and I do not know —neither does Larry—what will happen to us when the Security people find us, and we cannot answer their questions. But—

. I am a woman now, and I love like a woman. Larry will not be their pet; so I cannot be. I am not sure that I am fit to be what Larry thinks of as a "human being." He says I must learn to be "my own master." I am not at all sure I could do this, if it were nceessary, but fortunately, this is one of Larry's areas of semantic confusion. The feminine of *master* is *mistress*, which has various meanings.

Also, there is the distinct possibility, from what Larry says, that we will not, *either* of us, be allowed even as much liberty as we have here.

There is also the matter of gratitude. *They* brought me up, took care of me, taught me, loved me, gave me a way of life, and a knowledge of myself, infinitely richer than I could ever have had on Earth. Perhaps they even saved my life, healing me when I was quite possibly beyond the power of Earthly medical science to save. But against all this—

They caused the damage to start with. It was *their* force-field that wrecked the car and killed my parents. *They* have paid for it; *they* are paying for it yet. *They* will continue to pay, for more years than make sense in terms of a human lifetime. *They* will continue to wander from planet to planet and system to system, because *they* have broken *their* own law, and now may never go home.

But *I* can.

I am a woman, and Larry is a man. We will go home and have our baby. And perhaps the baby will be the means of our freedom, some day. If we cannot speak to save ourselves, he may some day be able to speak for us.

I do not think the blocks they set in us will penetrate my womb as my own thoughts, I hope, already have.

Author's note: Before writing this story—as a story—I talked with Johnny's parents. I approached them cautiously. His mother is a big woman, and a brunette. His father is a friendly fat redhead. I already knew that neither of them reads science-fiction. The word is not likely to be mentioned in their household.

They moved to town about three years ago. Nobody here knew them before that, but there are rumors that Johnny is adopted. They did not volunteer any confirmation of that information when I talked to them, and they did not pick up on any of the leads I offered about his recitation.

Johnny himself is small and fair-haired. He takes after his paternal grandmother, his mother says . . .

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it's all yours

by . . . Sam Merwin Jr.

It was a lonely thing to rule over a dying world—a world that had become sick, so terribly sick. . . .

THE Chancellor's private washroom, discreetly off the innermost of his official suite of offices, was a dream of gleaming black porcelain and solid gold. Each spout, each faucet, was a gracefully stylized mermaid, the combination stall shower-steam room a marvel of hydraulic comfort and decor with variable lighting plotted to give the user every sort of beneficial ray, from ultraviolet to black heat.

But Bliss was used to it. At the moment, as he washed his hands, he was far more concerned with the reflection of his face in the mirror above the dolphin-shaped bowl. With a sort of wry resignation, he accepted the red rims of fatigue around his eyes, the batch of white at his left temple that was spreading toward the top of his dark, well-groomed head. He noted that the lines rising from the corners of his mouth to the curves of his nostrils seemed to have deepened noticeably during the past few days.

As he dried his hands in the airstream, he told himself that he was letting his imagination run away with him—imagination had always

It was a strange and bitter Earth over which the Chancellor ruled—a strange and deformed world. There were times when the Chancellor suspected that he really was a humanistic old fool, but this seemed to be his destiny and it was difficult to be anything else. Human, like all other organic life on Earth, was dying. Where it spawned, it spawned monsters. What was to be the answer?

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been his weakness, and a grave failing for a head of state. And while he drew on his special, featherweight gloves, he reminded himself that, if he was aging prematurely, it was nobody's fault but his own. No other man or woman approaching qualification for the job would have taken it—only a sentimental, humanistic fool like himself.

He took a quick sip from the benzedral fountain, waited for the restorative to do its work. Then, feeling moderately refreshed, he returned to his office, sank into the plastifoam cushions of the chair behind his tabletop mountain of a desk and pressed the button that informed Myra, his confidential secretary, he was ready.

There were five in the delegation—by their collars or robes, a priest, a rabbi, a lama, a dark-skinned Watusi witchman and a white robed abbess draped in chaste, flowing white. Automatically, he surveyed them, checking. The priest's right shoe was twice as broad as his left, the rabbi's head, beneath the black cap that covered it, was long and thin as a zucchini squash. The witchman, defiantly bare and black as ebony from the waist up, had a tiny duplicate of his own handsome head sprouting from the base of his sternum. The visible deformities of the lama and abbess were concealed beneath their flowing robes. But they were there—they had to be there.

Bliss rose as they entered and said, waving a gloved hand at the chairs on their side of the desk, "Greetings, sirs and madam—please be seated." And, when they were comfortable, "Now, to what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

He knew, of course—sometimes he thought he knew more than any man should be allowed or able to know—but courtesy and custom demanded the question. It was the witchman who answered. Apparently he was spokesman for the group.

He said, speaking beautiful Cantabrigian English, "Honorable sir, we have come as representatives of the religions of the world, not to protest but in a spirit of enquiry. Our flocks grow increasingly restive, when they are not leaving us altogether, our influence grows less. We wish to know what steps, if any, are being taken toward modification or abrogation of the sterility program. Without hope of posterity, mankind is lost."

While the others murmured their agreement, Bliss focused his gaze on the sealed lids of the tiny face sprouting from the Watusi's breastbone. He wondered if there were eyes behind them, if there were a tongue behind those tiny clamped lips, and what words such a tongue would utter if it could speak.

"We are waiting, honorable sir," the spokesman said.

Shaking himself free of the absorption, Bliss glanced at the teleprompter on his desk. Efficient as ever, Myra had their names there before him. He said, "Gentle

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R'hau-chi, I believe a simple exposition of our situation, and of what programs we are seeking to meet and mitigate it with, will give you the answers. Not, perhaps, the answers you seek, but the answers we must accept . . ."

Although the reports from World Laboratories changed from day to day, he knew the speech by heart. For the problem remained. Humanity, like virtually all other organic life on Earth, was dying. Where it spawned, it spawned monsters. On three-dimensional vidar rolls, he showed them live shots of what the laboratories were doing, what they were trying to do—in the insemination groups, the incubators, the ray bombardment chambers, the parthenogenesis bureau.

Studying them, he could see by their expressions, hear by the prayers they muttered, how shocking these revelations were. It was one thing to know what was going on—another for them to see for themselves. It was neither pretty—nor hopeful.

When it was over, the rabbi spoke. He said, in deep, slightly gutteral, vastly impressive intonations, "What about Mars, honorable sir? Have you reached communication with our brothers and sisters on the red planet?"

Bliss shook his head. He glanced at the alma-calendar at his elbow and told them, "Mars continues to maintain silence—as it has for two hundred and thirty-one years. Ever since the final war."

They knew it, but they had to hear it from him to accept it even briefly. There was silence, long wretched silence. Then the abbess spoke. She said, "Couldn't we send out a ship to study conditions first hand, honorable sir?"

Bliss sighed. He said, "The last four spaceships on Earth were sent to Mars at two-year intervals during the last perehelions. Not one of them came back. That was more than a half century ago. Since I accepted this office, I have had some of our ablest remaining scientific brains working on the problem of building a new ship. They have not been successful." He laid his gloved hands, palms upward, on the desk, added, "It appears that we have lost the knack for such projects."

When they were gone, he walked to the broad window and looked out over the World Capital buildings at the verdant Sahara that stretched hundreds of miles to the foot of the faintly purple Atlas Mountains on the northwestern horizon. A blanket of brilliant green, covering what had once been the greatest of all Earthly deserts—but a poisonous blanket of strange plant mutations, some of them poisonous beyond belief.

Truly, Bliss thought, he belonged to a remarkable species. Man had conquered his environment, he had even, within the limits of the Solar System, conquered space. He had planted, and successfully, his own kind on a neighboring planet

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and made it grow. But man had never, at least on his home planet, conquered himself.

Overpopulation had long since ceased to be a problem—the atomic wars had seen to that. But, thanks to the miracles of science—atomics and automation—man had quickly rebuilt the world into a Garden of Eden with up-to-date plumbing. He might have won two planets, but he had turned his Eden into an arbor of deadly nightshade.

Oddly, it had not been the dreadful detonations of thermo-nuclear bombs that had poisoned his paradise—though, of course, they had helped. It had been the constant spillage of atomic waste into the upper atmosphere that had spelled ruin. Now, where four billion people had once lived in war and want, forty million lived in poisoned plenty. He was chancellor of a planet whose ruling species could not longer breed without disaster.

His was the last generation. It should have been a peaceful generation. But it was not.

For, as population decreased, so did the habitable areas of Earth. The formerly overpopulated temperate regions were now ghastly jungles of self-choking mutant plant growth. Only what had been the waste areas—Antarctica, the Gobi, Australia, Patagonia and the Sahara-Arabia districts—could still support even the strange sorts of human life that remained.

And the forty millions still alive were restless, frightened, paranoiac. Each believed his own group was being systematically exterminated in favor of some other. None had yet faced the fact that humanity, for all practical purposes, was already dead on Earth.

He sensed another presence in the room. It was Myra, his secretary, bearing a sheaf of messages in one hand, a sheaf of correspondence for him to sign in the other. She said, "You look beat, chancellor. Sit down."

Bliss sat down. Myra, as his faithful and efficient manumensis for more than fifteen years, had her rights. One of them was taking care of him during working hours. She was still rather pretty, he noted with surprise. An Afro-Asian with skin like dark honey and smooth, pleasant, rather flat features. It was, he thought, a pity she had that third eye in her forehead.

She stood beside him while he ran through the letters and signed them. "Meeting of the regional vice-chancellors tomorrow, eh?" he said as he handed them back to her.

"Right, chancellor," she said crisply. "Ten o'clock. You may have to take another whirlwind trip to tell them the situation is well in hand."

He grunted and glanced at the messages, scanned them quickly, tossed them into the disposal vent beside his desk. Myra looked moderately disapproving. "What about that possible ship from Mars?" she asked. "Shouldn't you look into it?"

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He grunted again, looked up at her, said, "If I'd looked into every 'ship from Mars' astronomy has come up with in the nine years I've held this office, I'd never have had time for anything else. You can lay odds it's a wild asteroid or something like that."

"They sound pretty sure this time," Myra said doubtfully.

"Don't they always?" he countered. "Come on, Myra, wrap it up. Time to go home."

"Roger, boss," she said, blinking all three eyes at him.

Bliss turned on the autopi and napped while the gyrojet carried him to his villa outside Dakar. Safely down on the roof of the comfortable, automatic white house, he took the lift down to his second-floor suite, where he showered and changed into evening sandals and clout. He redonned his gloves, then rode down another two flights to the terrace, where Elise was waiting for him in a gossamer-thin iridescent eggshell sari. They kissed and she patted the place on the love-seat beside her. She had a book—an old-fashioned book of colored reproductions of long-since-destroyed old masters on her lap. The artist was a man named Peter Paul Rubens.

Eyeing the opulent nudes, she giggled and said, "Don't they look awfully—plain? I mean, women with only two breasts!"

"Well—yes," he said. "If you want to take that angle."

"Idiot!" she said. "Honestly, darling, you're the strangest sort of man to be a World Chancellor."

"These are strange times," he told her, smiling without mirth, though with genuine affection.

"Suppose—just suppose," she said, turning the pages slowly, "biology should be successful in stabilizing the species again. Would they *have* to set it back that far? I mean, either we or *they* would feel awfully out of style."

"What would you suggest?" he asked her solemnly.

"Don't be nasty," she said loftily. Then she giggled again and ruffled his hair. "I wish you'd have it dyed one color," she told him. "Either black or gray—or why not a bright puce?"

"What's for dinner?" he asked, added, "If I can still eat after that."

The regional vice-chancellors were awaiting him in the next-to-the-innermost office when Bliss arrived at World Capitol the next morning. Australia, Antarctica, Patagonia, Gobi, Sahara-Arabia—they followed him inside like so many penguins in the black-and-white official robes. All were deathly serious as they stated their problems.

Gobi wanted annual rainfall cut from 60 to 45 centimeters.

Sahara-Arabia was not receiving satisfactory food synthetics—there had been Moslem riots because of pork flavor in the meat.

Patagonia was suffering through a species of sport-worm that was

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threatening to turn it into a desert if biology didn't come up with a remedy fast.

Antarctica wanted temperature lowered from a nighttime norm of 62° Fahrenheit to 57.6°. It seemed that the ice in the skating rinks, which were the chief source of exercise and entertainment for the populace, got mushy after ten p.m.

Australia wanted the heavy uranium deposits under the Great Central Desert neutralized against its causing further mutations.

For a moment, Bliss was tempted to remind his viceroys that it was not going to make one bit of difference whether they made their spoiled citizens happy or not. The last man on Earth would be dead within fifty years or so, anyway. But that would have been an unpardonable breach of taste. Everyone *knew,* of course, but it was never mentioned. To state the truth was to deny hope. And without hope, there was no life.

Bliss promised to see that these matters were tended to at once, taking each in turn. This done, they discussed his making another whirlwind trip through the remaining major dominions of the planet to bolster morale. He was relieved when at last, the amenities concluded, the penguins filed solemnly out. He didn't know which he found more unattractive—Gobi's atrophied third leg, strapped tightly to the inside of his left thigh and calf, or Australia's jackass ears. Then, sternly, he reminded himself that it was not their fault they weren't as lucky as himself.

Myra came in, her three eyes aglow, and said, "Boss, you were wrong for once in your life."

"What is it this time?" he asked.

"About that Martian ship," she repeated. "It just landed on the old spaceport. You can see it from the window."

"For God's sake!" Bliss was on his feet, moving swiftly to the window. It was there—needle-nosed, slim as one of the mermaids in his private washroom, graceful as a vidar dancer. The entire length of it gleamed like silver in the sunlight.

Bliss felt the premature old age that had been crowding upon him of late fall away like the wool of a sheep at shearing. Here, at last, was hope—real hope. After almost two and a half centuries of noncommunication, the men of the infant planet had returned to the aid of the aging planet. For, once they saw the condition of Earth, and understood it, there could be no question of anything else.

Mars, during the years of spaceflight from Earth, had been the outlet for the mother planet's ablest, toughest, brightest, most aggressive young men and women. They had gone out to lick a hostile environment, they had been handpicked for the job—and they had done it. The ship, out there in the poisonous Sahara, was living proof of their success.

He turned from the window and

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went back to his desk. He said, "Myra, have their leader brought here to see me as soon as possible."

"Ro*ger!*" she said, leaving him swiftly, gracefully. Again he thought it was too bad about her third eye. It had made it awfully hard for her to find a husband. He supposed he should be grateful, since it had made him an incomparably efficient secretary.

The young man was space-burned and silver-blond of hair. He was broad and fair of feature and his body was tall and lean and perfect in his black, skin-tight uniform with the silver rocket-burst on the left breast. He stood at attention, lifted a gauntletted hand in salute and said, "Your excellency, Chancellor Bliss—Space-Captain Hon Yaelstrom of Syrtis City, Mars, bearing official rank of Inter-planetary legate plenipotentiary. My papers, sir."

He stood stiff as a ramrod and laid a set of imposing looking documents on the vast desk before Bliss. His accent was stiff as his spinal column. Bliss glanced casually at the papers, nodded and handed them back. So this, he thought, was how a "normal," a pre-atomic, a non-mutated human, looked. Impressive.

Catching himself wandering, he pushed a box of costly smokes toward the ambassador.

"*Nein*—no thank you, sir," was the reply.

"Suppose you sit down and tell me what we can do for you," said Bliss, motioning toward a chair.

"Thank you, sir, I prefer to stand," was the reply. And, when Bliss motioned that it was all right, "My mission is not a happy one, excellency. Due to overpopulation on Mars, I have been sent to inform the government of Earth that room must be made to take care of our overpopulation."

"I see," Bliss leaned back in his chair, trying to read the situation correctly. "That may take a little doing. You see, we aren't exactly awash with real estate here."

The reply was rigid and harsh. Captain Yaelstrom said, "I regret to remind your excellency that I have circled this planet before landing. It is incredibly rich in plant growth, incredibly underpopulated. And I assure your excellency that my superiors have not sent me here with any idle request. Mars must have room to emigrate."

"And if we find ourselves unable to give it to you?"

"I fear we shall have to take it, your excellency."

Bliss studied the visitor from space, then said, "This is rather sudden, you know. I fear it will take time. You must have prospered amazingly on Mars to have overpopulated the planet so soon."

"Conditions have not been wholly favorable," was the cryptic reply. "But as to time, we are scarcely in condition to move our surplus population overnight. It will take years—perhaps decades—twenty-five years at a minimum."

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Twenty-five years! That was too soon. If Captain Maelstrom were a typical Martian, there was going to be trouble. Bliss recalled again that Earth had sent only its most aggressive young folk out to the red planet. He made up his mind then and there that he was somehow going to salvage for Earth its final half-century of peace.

He said, "How many people do you plan to send here, Captain?"

The ambassador hesitated. Then he said, "According to the computations of our experts, taking the population curve during the next twenty-five years into account, there will be seventeen million, three hundred thirty-two thousand five hundred—approximately."

The figure was too large to be surplus, Bliss decided. It sounded to him as if humanity were about to abandon Mars completely. He wondered what the devil had gone wrong, decided this was hardly the time to ask. He offered Captain Yaelstrom a drink, which was refused, then asked him if he wouldn't like to wash up.

To his mild surprise, the ambassador nodded eagerly. "I shall be grateful," he said. "You have no idea how cramped spaceship quarters can be."

"I can imagine," said Bliss dryly. He led the way into the black-and-gold washroom, was amused at the slight but definite popping of ambassadorial eyes. Earth might be dying, he thought, but at least her destroyers would leave a heritage. He motioned toward the basin with its mermaid taps and Captain Yaelstrom hesitated, then began pulling off his black gauntlets.

Bliss thought of something. "You mentioned twenty-five years," he said. "Is that Martian time or Earth time?"

"Martian time," said the ambassador, letting the water run over his hands.

Twenty-five years, Martian time—a Martian year was 1.88 Earth years. Bliss exhaled and said, "I think perhaps we shall be able to come to an agreement. It will take a little time, of course—channels, and all that."

The Martian held his hands in front of the air-drier. They were strong, brown hands with long, muscular fingers. Bliss looked at them and knew the whole story. For, like himself, Captain Yaelstrom had seven fingers on each. Man had done no better on Mars than he had at home. The reason for such a desperate move as emigration was all too clear.

Captain Yaelstrom stood back from the bowl, then noticed the stall shower. He said, "What is this? We have nothing like it on Mars."

Bliss explained its several therapeutic uses, then said, "Perhaps you'd like to try it yourself while I order us luncheon."

"May I, excellency?" the Martian legate asked eagerly.

"Go right ahead," said Bliss magnanimously. "It's all yours."

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fall guy

by . . . Eric Frank Russell

What embarrassing thing had Latimore promised his Exalted — but not too bright — Highness of Kasooma?

THE Kasooma of Kasooma stalked in with kingly mien and stately gait. His expression was that of one appalled by the perfidy of something or other. He was followed in single file by his umbrella-bearer, his senior secretary and his keeper of ancestral spirits. The spirits reposed in an earthenware pot which the keeper carried with a permanent air of awestruck reverence.

Reaching the counter the Kasooma of Kasooma halted. So did the umbrella-bearer, the secretary, the keeper of ancestral spirits. The Kasooma of Kasooma raised a regal forefinger and spake unto Cassidy.

"I wish to see the Earth Consul."

Since Cassidy happened to be enjoying a lucid moment the desire would have been immediately clear to him had it been expressed in a familiar language. But the Kasooma of Kasooma came from a sister world whose speech was yet known only to a favored few.

So Cassidy made pacifying gestures and bellowed toward the back office, "Hynd! Hynd!"

"What is this word he shouts?" asked the Kasooma, glowering at his secretary.

The Kasooma of Kasooma was a kingly guy—very kingly and very mad. Diplomatic relations had been severed for flimsier reasons than this barefaced breach of contract. The Kasooma of Kasooma was very very annoyed.

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"I do not know it, sire," confessed that worthy. "It appears to me that he is summoning somebody."

Hynd arrived at that moment and Cassidy said to him hurriedly, "A deputation from Galapan by the looks of it. You know their jargon —you'd better handle them."

Giving a nod of understanding, Hynd turned to the Kasooma and spoke in badly beaten-up but surviving Galapanese. "A thousand summers! What do you wish?"

"To see the Earth Consul," repeated the Kasooma of Kasooma, with considerable firmness.

"Have you an appointment?"

"An appointment? I am the Kasooma! I do not need an appointment. What nonsense is this? Why should I have an appointment?"

"It is the normal procedure," informed Hynd, making it mild and soothing. "The Consul is a very busy man."

"You mean the Consul will not see me?" The Kasooma's yellow eyes sparked, the scaly, reptilian skin of his face grew taut.

"Most certainly he will see you," Hynd assured. "But without an appointment we are forced to subject you to the discourtesy of a small delay."

"Tell him that the Kasooma is here, in person," firmly ordered the Kasooma. "That will be sufficient."

"I will go to him at once," Hynd promised.

"What's all the gab about?" interjected Cassidy, baffled.

"They want to hock the umbrella," Hynd told him, and bolted down the corridor.

"Zat so?" Cassidy bleared at the umbrella which was nine feet in diameter and had a fringe of crimson tassels all around its rim.

Wilmot Masterson, the Earth Consul, grunted heavily. "The Kasooma controls a third of Galapan. His brother bosses another third. His two uncles share government of the remainder. We can't afford to rile that bunch. Bring him here immediately."

"Right, sir!" agreed Hynd.

He went out, returned in short time with the visitors. The procession did not get into the room for the reason that the umbrella stuck in the doorway. Its bearer went pale, backed off into the passage, tried to wangle it through sidewise. It wouldn't go. He got quite desperate about it and still it wouldn't go. Finally he gave up and looked at the Kasooma with apologetic despair.

"Tell them to leave the lousy thing in the corridor," Masterson ordered Hynd.

"The Consul suggests you leave it in the corridor," Hynd said to the Kasooma.

"I cannot talk without it," declared the Kasooma in the manner of one mentioning the obvious to a retarded child.

"He cannot talk without it," Hynd told Masterson.

"Why can't he?" demanded

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Masterson, successfully struggling to conceal his exasperation.

"Why can't you?" repeated Hynd, who didn't give a damn one way or the other.

"Because," said the Kasooma, loftily, "it is the speech-umbrella."

"He says it's the speech-umbrella," Hynd informed Masterson.

"Oh, hell!" said Masterson, with undiplomatic emphasis. "Why can't they close it, bring it in here and open it again?"

The Kasooma viewed this suggestion as a positive touch of genius and further proof of the Earthman's never-ending adaptability. The umbrella was closed, brought in, opened, and poised ceremoniously above its owner's head.

Thus prepared, the Kasooma fixed injured attention upon Masterson and gave forth. "I have made an agreement. I demand that it be honored."

With Hynd functioning as interpreter, Masterson asked, "You mean that you have a complaint to the effect that a contract has been broken?"

"That is correct," the Kasooma said in aggrieved tones. "Repeatedly it has been poured into my ears that all agreements made with Earthmen will be kept to the letter. It has been said times without number that, if necessary, the Earth Government will not hesitate to intervene and compel justice to be done."

"Justice *will* be done," asserted Masterson, frowning. "You can depend upon that." He paused, added for good measure, "Absolutely!"

"I am gratified to hear you say so," commented the Kasooma, as though he'd been nursing serious doubts about the matter.

"Earth's dealings with other peoples," assured Masterson, ponderously, "are invariably founded upon strict justice. And justice will always be given no matter what the cost."

"Good!" said the Kasooma, smacking his lips.

"Now," Masterson went on, "it is necessary for me to know in detail the nature of your complaint, the manner in which you have suffered injustice. With whom did you make this agreement?"

"With an Earthman named Latimer."

"Latimer?" echoed Masterson, his eyebrows waggling. He let go a deep sigh, said in English to Hynd, "Go on, get him to tell us the worst. Whatever Latimer has pulled on him is sure to be a stinker."

The Kasooma said, "This Latimer found outside my palace grounds a quantity of colorless stones. He asked permission to dig up more of them for a period of twelve Earth-months." He turned to his secretary. "What did he call these stones?"

"Diamonds," said the secretary.

"Diamonds," repeated the Kasooma.

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Masterson breathed heavily. "So *that's* where illicit supplies have been coming from. Wait until I tell Gem Control about this!"

"I gave permission," continued the Kasooma, "and I provided Latimer with two hundred workers to help him dig. They have exhumed these stones called diamonds for twelve months. Now Latimer has disappeared. He has failed to keep his side of the bargain. Therefore the Earth Government must make it good."

"The contract will be honored," promised Masterson, pulling a face. "But it will take a little time."

"Why?"

"We must trace Latimer, seize his loot and have it valued before we can pay you whatever percentage he promised. How much did he agree to give you?"

"How much?" The Kasooma registered deep distaste. "There was no question of how much. I have no use for worthless rocks. I have no use for money, either."

"Well, what did he promise you in exchange for what he dug up?" inquired Masterson, making a guess at the Brooklyn Bridge.

"A female," said the Kasooma, smacking his lips again. "A female of Earth."

"Verily," confirmed the Kasooma. "I saw one once," he contin-

"Verily," confirmed the Kasooma. "I saw one once," he continued with indecent gusto, "and she had soft, pink skin, blue eyes, golden hair. I desire such a one for my harem. I should have one!"

"But she would be of quite a different species," Masterson protested.

"That," said the Kasooma, leering at him, "makes it so much the more interesting."

Masterson took on a faint shade of purple, said to Hynd, "If Latimer has contracted to ship him a floozie he's over-stepped the mark for once. Transporting a woman for an immoral purpose can get him a life sentence."

"Latimer's too smart to be caught that way," Hynd pointed out. "He hasn't actually transported anyone. He's merely promised to do so."

"Either way he's in trouble, serious trouble. If he ships an Earthwoman to an alien species he'll be stuck in the jug for life. If he doesn't, he's liable to ten years' imprisonment for failing to fulfill a contract with an alien lifeform. It's not like Latimer to get himself into such a jam. So far he's been too slippery to catch. Goes to show that all his type ride to a fall sooner or later."

"This female," interjected the Kasooma impatiently. "Latimer said it would take her twelve months to reach Galapan from Earth. The twelve months have passed. I have received no female. I demand that she be supplied without further delay."

Masterson sought frantically around for an escape, found it, hit back good and hard. "I regret that it cannot be done."

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"Why can it not?" Then the Kasooma's eyes blazed while his followers edged away nervously. "Is this Earth justice?"

"A verbal contract," explained Masterson, hiding a smirk, "is worthless in law. To have any value it must be written and signed."

"The contract *is* written and signed."

Masterson's expression became cunning. "In the contract the subjects of mutual advantage must be defined. What that means is that the location of the diamond-field must be given and the woman must be named."

"The field *is* defined and the woman *is* named."

Going grim, Masterson said, "May I see it?"

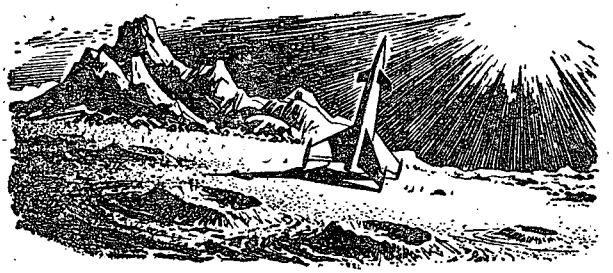
The secretary produced a sheet of grubby paper, gave it to the Kasooma who handed it to Masterson with the air of settling the issue once and for all. Masterson took it, peered at the clumsy scrawl.

Agreed this day between Jeff Latimer and the Kasooma of Kasooma: that the said Jeff Latimer shall have the right to scram with all the diamonds he can grab in twelve months from the field immediately east of the royal palace in exchange for Sweet Fanny Adams.

"Well," urged the Kasooma, wetting his lips, "do I or do I not get this Earth-female?"

It took five hours to explain.

The umbrella broke a rib going out.



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a newly discovered story by the great ROBERT E. HOWARD —a remarkable new novelet by ROBERT F. YOUNG—and stories by EVELYN E. SMITH, HANNES BOK, KENNETH BULMER, WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT, WALT SHELDON and others — selected for YOU who read

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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the hohokam dig

by . . . Theodore Pratt

At first they thought the attack was a joke. And then they realized the truth!

AT FIRST the two scientists thought the Indian attack on them was a joke perpetrated by some of their friends. After all, modern Indians did not attack white men any more.

Except that these did.

George Arthbut and Sidney Hunt were both out of New York, on the staff of the Natural History Museum. George was an ethnologist who specialized in what could be reconstructed about the prehistoric Indians of North America, with emphasis on those of the Southwest. He was a tall, lean, gracious bald man in his early sixties.

Sidney was an archeologist who was fascinated by the ruins of the same kind of ancient Indians. Medium-sized, with black hair that belied his sixty-five years, he and George made an excellent team, being the leaders in their field.

They had come west on a particular bit of business this spring, trying to solve the largest question that remained about the old cliff-dwellers and the prehistoric desert Indians, both of whom had deserted their villages and gone elsewhere for reasons that remained a mystery.

One theory was that drought had

From where *had these attacking Indians come? Out of a long forgotten and dim past? Had their medicine man seen the one supreme vision?*

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driven them both away. Another theory ran to the effect that enemies wiped them out or made off with them as captives. Still another supposition, at least for the Hohokam desert people, the builders of Casa Grande whose impressive ruins still stood near Coolidge, had to do with their land giving out so they could no longer grow crops, forcing them to go elsewhere to find better soil. No one really knew. It was all pure guesswork.

The two scientists meant to spend the entire summer trying to solve this riddle for all time, concentrating on it to the exclusion of everything else. They drove west in a station wagon stuffed with equipment and tracking a U-Haul-It packed with more.

George drove, on a road that was only two sand tracks across the wild empty desert between Casa Grande Monument and Tonto National Monument where cliffdwellers had lived. It was here, not far ahead, in new ruins that were being excavated, that they hoped to solve the secret of the exodus of the prehistoric Indians. The place was known as the Hohokam Dig.

They topped a rise of ground and came to the site of the dig. Here the sand tracks ended right in the middle of long trenches dug out to reveal thick adobe walls. In the partially bared ruins the outline of a small village could be seen; the detailed excavation would be done this summer by workmen who would arrive from Phoenix and Tucson.

George stopped their caravan and the two men got out, stretching their legs. They looked about, both more interested in the dig, now they were back at it, than setting up camp. They walked around, examining various parts of it, and the excitement of the promise of things to be discovered in the earth came to them. "This summer we'll learn the answer," Sidney predicted.

With skeptical hope George replied, "Maybe."

It was early afternoon when they set up camp, getting out their tent from the U-Haul-It. They took out most of their gear, even setting up a portable TV set run on batteries brought along. They worked efficiently and rapidly, having done this many times before and having their equipment well organized from long experience. By the middle of the afternoon all was ready and they rested, sitting on folding chairs at a small table just outside the opening of their tent.

Looking around at the dig Sidney remarked, "Wouldn't it be easy if we could talk to some of the people who once lived here?"

"There's a few questions I'd like to ask them," said George. "I certainly wish we had some to talk with."

He had no more than uttered this casual wish than there sounded, from all sides of where they sat, screeching whoops. The naked brown men who suddenly appeared

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seemed to materialize from right out of the excavations. As they yelled they raised their weapons. The air was filled, for an instant, with what looked like long arrows. Most of them whistled harmlessly past the two scientists, but one hit the side of the station wagon, making a resounding thump and leaving a deep dent, while two buried themselves in the wood of the U-Haul-It and remained there, quivering.

George and Sidney, after the shock of their first surprise at this attack, leaped to their feet.

"The car!" cried Sidney. "Let's get out of here!"

They both started to move. Then George stopped and grabbed Sidney's arm. "Wait!"

"Wait?" Sidney demanded. "They'll kill us!"

"Look," advised George, indicating the red men who surrounded them; they now made no further move of attack.

George gazed about. "Oh," he said, "you think somebody's playing a joke on us?"

"Could be," said George. He ran one hand over his bald head.

"Some dear friends," Sidney went on, resenting the scare that had been thrown into them, "hired some Indians to pretend to attack us?"

"Maybe Pimas," said George. He peered at the Indians, who now were jabbering among themselves and making lamenting sounds as they glanced about at the ruins of the ancient village. There were eighteen of them. They were clad in nothing more than a curious cloth of some kind run between their legs and up and over a cord about their waists, to form a short apron, front and back.

"Or Zunis," said Sidney.

"Maybe Maricopas," said George.

"Except," Sidney observed, "none of them look like those kind of Indians. And those arrows they shot." He stared at the two sticking in the U-Haul-It. "Those aren't arrows, George — they're atlati lances!"

"Yes," said George.

Sidney breathed, "They aren't holding bows—they've got atlatls!"

"No modern Indian of any kind," said George, "uses an atlatl."

"Most of them wouldn't even know what it was," Sidney agreed. "They haven't been used for hundreds of years; the only place you see them is in museums."

An atlatl was the weapon which had replaced the stone axe in the stone age. It was a throwing stick consisting of two parts. One was the lance, a feathered shaft up to four feet long, tipped with a stone point. The two-foot flat stick that went with this had a slot in one end and two rawhide finger loops. The lance end was fitted in the slot to be thrown. The stick was an extension of the human arm to give the lance greater force. Some atlatls had small charm stones attached to

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them to give them extra weight and magic.

Charm stones could be seen fastened to a few of the atlatls being held by the Indians now standing like bronze statues regarding them.

George whispered, "What do you make of it?"

"It isn't any joke," replied Sidney. He gazed tensely at the Indians. "That's all I'm sure of."

"Have you noticed their breechclouts?"

Sidney stared again. "They aren't modern clouts. George, they're right out of Hohokam culture!"

"They aren't made of cloth, either. That's plaited yucca fibre."

"Just like we've dug up many times. Only here. . . ." George faltered. "It's being worn by—by I don't know what."

"Look at their ornaments."

Necklaces, made of pierced colored stones, hung about many of the brown necks. Shell bracelets were to be seen, and here and there a carved piece of turquoise appeared.

"Look at the Indian over there," George urged.

Sidney looked to the side where George indicated, and croaked, "It's a girl!"

It was a girl indeed. She stood straight and magnificent in body completely bare except for the brief apron at her loins. Between her beautiful full copper breasts there hung a gleaming piece of turquoise carved in the shape of a coyote.

At her side stood a tall young Indian with a handsome face set with great pride. On her other side was a wizened little old fellow with a wrinkled face and ribs corrugated like a saquaro.

Sidney turned back and demanded, "What do you make of this? Are we seeing things?" Hopefully, he suggested, "A mirage or sort of a mutual hallucination?"

In a considered, guaging tone George replied, "They're real."

"Real?" cried Sidney. "What do you mean, real?"

"Real in a way. I mean, Sidney, these—I sound crazy to myself saying it—but I think these are—well, Sid, maybe they're actual prehistoric Indians."

"Huh?"

"Well, let's put it this way: We asked for them and we got them."

Sidney stared, shocked at George's statement. "You're crazy, all right," he said. "Hohokams in the middle of the Twentieth Century?"

"I didn't say they're Hohokams, though they probably are, of the village here."

"You said they're prehistoric," Sidney accused. He quavered, "Just how could they be?"

"Sid, you remember in our Indian studies, again and again, we meet the medicine man who has visions. Even modern ones have done things that are pretty impossible to explain. I believe they have spiritual powers beyond the capability of the white man. The prehistoric medicine men may have developed this power even more. I

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think the old man there is their medicine man."

"So?" Sidney invited.

"I'm just supposing now, mind you," George went on. He rubbed his bald pate again as though afraid of what thoughts were taking place under it. "Maybe way back—a good many hundreds of years ago—this medicine man decided to have a vision of the future. And it worked. And here he is now with some of his people."

"Wait a minute," Sidney objected. "So he had this vision and transported these people to this moment in time. But if it was hundreds of years ago they're already dead, been dead for a long time, so how could they—"

"Don't you see, Sid? They can be dead, but their appearance in the future—for them—couldn't occur until now because it's happened with us and we weren't living and didn't come along here at the right time until this minute."

Sidney swallowed. "Maybe," he muttered, "maybe."

"Another thing," George said. "If we can talk with them we can learn everything we've tried to know in all our work and solve in a minute what we're ready to spend the whole summer, even years, digging for."

Sidney brightened. "That's what we wanted to do."

George studied the Indians again. "I think they're just as surprised as we are. When they discovered themselves here and saw us—and you must remember we're the first white men they've ever seen—their immediate instinct was to attack. Now that we don't fight back they're waiting for us to make a move."

"What do we do?"

"Take it easy," advised George. "Don't look scared and don't look belligerent. Look friendly and hope some of the modern Indian dialects we know can make connection with them."

The two scientists began, at a gradual pace, to make their way toward the old man, the young man, and the girl. As they approached, the girl drew back slightly. The young man reached over his shoulder and from the furred quiver slung on his back drew an atlatl lance and fitted it to his throwing stick, holding it ready. The other warriors, all about, followed suit.

The medicine man alone stepped forward. He held up a short colored stick to which bright feathers were attached and shook it at the two white men. They stopped.

"That's his aspergill," observed Sidney. "I'd like to have that one."

The medicine man spoke. At first the scientists were puzzled, then George told Sidney, "That's Pima, or pretty close to it, just pronounced differently. It probably shows we were right in thinking the Pimas descended from these people. He wants to know who we are."

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George gave their names. The medicine man replied, "The man who has white skin instead of red speaks our language in a strange way. I am Huk." He turned to the young man at his side and said, "This is Good Fox, our young chief." He indicated the girl. "That is Moon Water, his wife."

George explained what he and the other white man with him were doing here. Huk, along with all the other Indians, including Good Fox and Moon Water, listened intently; they seemed greatly excited and disturbed.

When George was finished Good Fox turned to Huk and said, "You have succeeded, wise one, in bringing us forward, far in the future to the time of these men with white skins."

"This is the truth," said the wrinkled Huk; he did not boast but rather seemed awed.

Moon Water spoke in a frightened tone. She looked about at the partially excavated ruins and asked, "But what has happened to our village?" She faltered, "Is this the way it will look in the future?"

"It is the way," Good Fox informed her sorrowfully.

"I weep for our people," she said. "I do not want to see it." She hung her pretty face over her bare body, then, in a moment, raised it resolutely.

Good Fox shook the long scraggly black hair away from his eyes and told the white men, "We did not mean to harm you. We did not know what else to do upon finding you here and our village buried."

Ignoring that in his excited interest, Sidney asked, "What year are you?"

"Year?" asked Good Fox. "What is this word?"

Both Sidney and George tried to get over to him what year meant in regard to a date in history, but Good Fox, Huk, and Moon Water, and none of the others could understand.

"We do not know what you mean," Huk said. "We know only that we live here in this village—not as you see it now—but one well built and alive with our people. As the medicine man I am known to have extra power and magic in visions. Often I have wondered what life would be like in the far future. With this group I conjured up a vision of it, carrying them and myself to what is now here before us."

George and Sidney glanced at each other. George's lips twitched and those of Sidney trembled. George said softly to the Indians, "Let us be friends." He explained to them what they were doing here. "We are trying to find out what you were—are—like. Especially what made you desert people leave your villages."

They looked blank. Huk said, "But we have not left—except in this vision."

In an aside to George, Sidney said, "That means we've caught them before they went south or

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wherever they went." He turned back to Huk. "Have the cliffpeople yet deserted their dwellings?"

Huk nodded solemnly. "They have gone. Some of them have joined us here, and more have gone to other villages."

"We have read that into the remains of your people, especially at Casa Grande," Sidney told him. With rising excitement in his voice he asked, "Can you tell us why they left?"

Huk nodded. "This I can do."

Now the glance of Sidney and George at each other was quick, their eyes lighting.

"I'll take it down on the typewriter," Sidney said. "Think of it! Now we'll know."

He led Huk to the table set in front of the tent, where he brought out a portable typewriter and opened and set it up. He sat on one chair, and Huk, gingerly holding his aspergill before him as though to protect himself, sat on the other.

Good Fox, Moon Water and the other Indians crowded about, curious to see the machine that came alive under Sidney's fingers as Huk began to relate his story. Soon their interest wandered in favor of other things about the two men with white skin. They wanted to know about the machine with four legs.

George opened up the hood of the station wagon and showed them the engine. He sat in the car and started the motor. At the noise the Indians jumped back, alarmed, and reaching for their atlatls. Moon Water approached the rear end of the car. Her pretty nose wrinkled at the fumes coming from it and she choked, drawing back in disgust. "It is trying to kill me," she said.

Clearly, she did not approve of an automobile.

George cut off its engine.

Over Good Fox's shoulder hung a small clay waterjug hung in a plaited yucca net. George asked for a drink from it and when he tasted it and found it fresh it was wondrous to him that its water was hundreds of years old. He brought out a thermos, showing the Indians, the modern version of carrying water. They tasted of its contents and exclaimed at its coolness. Good Fox held the thermos, admiring it.

"Would you like to have it?" asked George.

"You would give it to me?" the handsome young Indian asked.

"It's yours."

"Then I give you mine." He gave George his clay waterjug and could not know how much more valuable it was than the thermos.

George then took them to the portable television set and turned it on. When faces, music, and words appeared the Indians jerked back, then jabbered and gathered closer to watch. A girl singer, clad in a gown that came up to her neck, caused Moon Water to inquire, "Why does she hide herself? Is she ashamed?"

The standards of modesty, George reflected as he glanced at

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the lovely nude form of the prehistoric Indian girl, change with the ages.

Of the people and noises on the TV screen Good Fox wanted to know quite solemnly, "Are these crazy people? Is it the way you treat your people who go crazy?"

George laughed. "You might say it's something like that."

A shout came from Sidney at the card table near the tent where he was taking down Huk's story. "George! He's just told me why the cliff people left! And why the desert people will have to leave in time. It's a reason we never thought of! It's because—"

Just then a big multi-engined plane came over, drowning out his words. The Indians stared skyward, now in great alarm. They looked about for a place to run and hide, but there was none. They held their hands over their ears and glanced fearfully at the TV which now spluttered, its picture and sound thrown off by the plane. Awesomely, they waited until the plane went over.

"We fly now in machines with wings," George explained.

"To make such a noise in the air," Moon Water said, "is wicked, destroying all peace."

"I'll agree with you there," said George.

"You have this," Good Fox observed, indicating the TV, which was now back to normal, "and you send the other through the sky to make it crazier than before." He shook his head, not comprehending.

George shut off the TV. He took up a camera of the kind that automatically finishes a picture in a minute's time. Grouping Good Fox, Moon Water and the other warriors, he took their picture, waited, then pulled it out and showed it to them.

They cried out, one man shouting in fear, "It is great magic!"

George took a number of photographs, including several of Huk as he sat talking with Sidney. No matter what happened he would have this record as Sidney would have that he was taking down on the typewriter.

Next he showed them a pair of binoculars, teaching them how to look through them. They exclaimed and Good Fox said, "With this we could see our enemies before they see us."

"You have enemies?" George asked.

"The Apache," Good Fox said fiercely.

George handed him the binoculars. "It is yours to use against the Apache."

Solemnly the young chief answered, "The man with white skin is thanked. The red man gives in return his atlatl and lances." He held out his throwing stick and unslung his quiver of lances. George accepted them with thanks; they would be museum pieces.

Finally George showed them a rifle. He looked about for game and after some searching saw a

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rabbit sitting on a mound in the excavations. As he took aim Good Fox asked, "You would hunt it with your stick?"

George nodded.

"This cannot be done from here," stated one warrior.

George squeezed the trigger. Instantaneously with the explosion of the shell the rabbit jumped high and then came down, limp and dead. The Indians yelled with fright and ran off in all directions. Huk jumped up from the table. Then all stopped and cautiously returned. One went to the rabbit and picked it up, bringing it back. All, including Huk who left the table, stared with fright at it and at the rifle.

Moon Water expressed their opinion of it. "The thunder of the killing stick is evil."

"Moon Water speaks the truth," said Huk.

"It would make hunting easy," said Good Fox, "but we do not want it even if given to us."

He drew back from the rifle, and the others edged away from it.

George put it down.

Sidney held up a sheaf of papers. "I've got it all, George," he said exultantly in English, "right here! I asked Huk if they can stay with us in our time, at least for awhile. We can study them more, maybe even take them back to show the world."

"What did he say?"

"He didn't have a chance to reply when you shot the rifle."

George put it formally to the Indians, addressing Huk, Good Fox, Moon Water and the rest. "You have seen something of the modern world. We would like you to stay in it if it is your wish. I don't know how long you could stay in Huk's vision, but if you can remain here permanently and not go back to your time and—well, not being alive there any more—we hope you will consider this."

Huk replied, "It is possible that we could stay in your time, at least as long as my vision lasts, which might be for as long as I lived." He glanced at Good Fox.

The young chief in turn looked at Moon Water. Her gaze went to the station wagon, to the TV, then up at the sky where the plane had appeared, at the rifle, the camera, the thermos, and all else of the white man. She seemed to weigh their values and disadvantages, looking dubious and doubtful.

Good Fox announced, "We will hold a council about it. As is our custom, all have words to say about such a thing."

Abruptly he led his people away, into the excavations and over a slight rise of ground, behind which they disappeared.

Sidney murmured, "I don't like that so much."

"They must do as they want." George led the way to the card table and they sat there. On it rested Huk's aspergill.

"He gave it to me," Sidney explained.

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George placed Good Fox's netted clay waterjug and his atlatl and furred quiver of lances on the table, together with the pictures he had taken of the ancient Indians. They waited.

Sidney, glancing at the low hill behind which the Indians had gone, said, "What they're doing is choosing between living in modern civilization and remaining dead. What do you think they'll do?"

"I don't know," said George. "They didn't think so much of us."

"But they couldn't choose death and complete oblivion!"

"We'll see."

They waited some more.

"At least," said Sidney, indicating the articles on the table, "we'll have these for evidence." He held up the sheaf of papers containing Huk's story. "And this, giving the real reason the cliffdwellers left. I haven't told you what it was, George. It's so simple that—"

He didn't complete his sentence, for just then Huk, Good Fox, Moon Water, and the other warriors made their choice. It was announced dramatically.

The waterjug, the aspergill, and the atlatl and quiver of lances disappeared from the table. In their places, suddenly, there were the thermos and the binoculars.

Sidney stared stupidly at them.

George said quietly, "They've gone back."

"But they can't do this!" George protested.

"They have."

Sidney's hand shook as he picked up the sheaf of papers holding Huk's story. Indicating it and the photographs he said, "Well, they haven't taken these away."

"Haven't they?" asked George. He picked up some of the pictures. "Look."

Sidney looked and saw that the pictures were now blank. His glance went quickly to the typewritten sheets of paper in his hands. He cried out and then shuffled them frantically.

They, too, were blank.

Sidney jumped up. "I don't care!" he exclaimed. "He told me and I've got it here!" He pointed to his head. "I can remember it, anyway."

"Can you?" asked George.

"Why, certainly I can," Sidney asserted confidently. "The reason the cliffdwellers left, George, was that they . . ." Sidney stopped.

"What's the matter, Sid?"

"Well, I—it—I guess it just slipped my mind for a second." His brow puckered. He looked acutely upset and mystified. "Huk told me," he faltered. "Just a minute ago I was thinking of it when I started to tell you. Now . . . I can't remember."

"That's gone, too."

"I'll get it!" Sidney declared. "I've just forgotten it for a minute. I'll remember!"

"No," said George, "you won't."

Sidney looked around. "There must be something left." He thought. "The atlatl lances they

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shot at us!" He looked at the U-Haul-It. The lances no longer stuck in its side. Nor were those that had fallen to the ground to be seen.

Sidney sat down again, heavily. "We had it all," he moaned. "Everything we'd been working for. And now . . ."

"Now we'll have to dig for it again," said George. "Do it the hard way. We'll start tomorrow when the workmen come."

Sidney looked up. "There's one thing!" he cried. "The dent in the car made by the lance! It's still there, George! However everything else worked, that was forgotten. It's still there!"

George glanced at the dent in the side panel of the station wagon. "It's still there," he agreed. "But only to tell us this wasn't a dream. No one else would believe it wasn't caused by a rock."

George groaned. He stared at the rise of ground behind which the Indians had disappeared. "Huk," he pleaded. "Good Fox. Moon Water. The others. Come back, come back . . ."

No one appeared over the rise of ground as the cool desert night began to close in.

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the velvet glove

by . . . Harry Harrison

New York was a bad town for robots this year. In fact, all over the country it was bad for robots. . . .

JON VENEX fitted the key into the hotel room door. He had asked for a large room, the largest in the hotel, and paid the desk clerk extra for it. All he could do now was pray that he hadn't been cheated. He didn't dare complain or try to get his money back. He heaved a sigh of relief as the door swung open, it was bigger than he had expected—fully three feet wide by five feet long. There was more than enough room to work in. He would have his leg off in a jiffy and by morning his limp would be gone.

There was the usual adjustable hook on the back wall. He slipped it through the recessed ring in the back of his neck and kicked himself up until his feet hung free of the floor. His legs relaxed with a rattle as he cut off all power from his waist down.

The overworked leg motor would have to cool down before he could work on it, plenty of time to skim through the newspaper. With the chronic worry of the unemployed he snapped it open at the want-ads and ran his eye down the *Help Wanted—Robot* column. There was nothing for him under the Specialist heading, even the Unskilled Labor listings were bare and un-

SF writer and editor Harry Harrison explores a not too distant future where robots—particularly specialist robots who don't know their place—have quite a rough time of it. True, the Robot Equality Act had been passed—but so what?

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promising. New York was a bad town for robots this year.

The want ads were just as depressing as usual but he could always get a lift from the comic section. He even had a favorite strip, a fact that he scarcely dared mention to himself. "Rattly Robot," a dull-witted mechanical clod who was continually falling over himself and getting into trouble. It was a repellant caricature, but could still be very funny. Jon was just starting to read it when the ceiling light went out.

It was ten P.M., curfew hour for robots. Lights out and lock yourself in until six in the morning, eight hours of boredom and darkness for all except the few night workers. But there were ways of getting around the letter of a law that didn't concern itself with a definition of visible light. Sliding aside some of the shielding around his atomic generator, Jon turned up the gain. As it began to run a little hot the heat waves streamed out—visible to him as infra-red rays. He finished reading the paper in the warm, clear light of his abdomen.

The thermocouple in the tip of his second finger left hand, he tested the temperature of his leg. It was soon cool enough to work on. The waterproof gasket stripped off easily, exposing the power leads, nerve wires and the weakened knee joint. The wires disconnected, Jon unscrewed the knee above the joint and carefully placed it on the shelf in front of him. With loving care he took the replacement part from his hip pouch. It was the product of toil, purchased with his savings from three months employment on the Jersey pig farm.

Jon was standing on one leg testing the new knee joint when the ceiling fluorescent flickered and came back on. Five-thirty already, he had just finished in time. A shot of oil on the new bearing completed the job; he stowed away the tools in the pouch and unlocked the door.

The unused elevator shaft acted as waste chute, he slipped his newspaper through a slot in the door as he went by. Keeping close to the wall, he picked his way carefully down the grease stained stairs. He slowed his pace at the 17th floor as two other mechs turned in ahead of him. They were obviously butchers or meatcutters; where the right hand should have been on each of them there stuck out a wicked, foot long knife. As they approached the foot of the stairs they stopped to slip the knives into the plastic sheaths that were bolted to their chestplates. Jon followed them down the ramp into the lobby.

The room was filled to capacity with robots of all sizes, forms and colors. Jon Venex's greater height enabled him to see over their heads to the glass doors that opened onto the street. It had rained the night before and the rising sun drove red glints from the puddles on the sidewalk. Three robots, painted snow white to show they were night

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workers, pushed the doors open and came in. No one went out as the curfew hadn't ended yet. They milled around slowly talking in low voices.

The only human being in the entire lobby was the night clerk dozing behind the counter. The clock over his head said five minutes to six. Shifting his glance from the clock Jon became aware of a squat black robot waving to attract his attention. The powerful arms and compact build identified him as a member of the Diger family, one of the most numerous groups. He pushed through the crowd and clapped Jon on the back with a resounding clang.

"Jon Venex! I knew it was you as soon as I saw you sticking up out of this crowd like a green tree trunk. I haven't seen you since the old days on Venus!"

Jon didn't need to check the number stamped on the short one's scratched chestplate. Alec Diger had been his only close friend during those thirteen boring years at Orange Sea Camp. A good chess player and a whiz at Two-handed Handball, they had spent all their off time together. They shook hands, with the extra squeeze that means friendliness.

"Alec, you beat-up little grease pot, what brings you to New York?"

"The burning desire to see something besides rain and jungle, if you must know. After you bought-out, things got just too damn dull. I began working two shifts a day in that foul diamond mine, and then three a day for the last month to get enough credits to buy my contract and passage back to earth. I was underground so long that the photocell on my right eye burned out when the sunlight hit it."

He leaned forward with a hoarse confidential whisper, "If you want to know the truth, I had a sixty carat diamond stuck behind the eye lens. I sold it here on earth for two-hundred credits, gave me six months of easy living. It's all gone now, so I'm on my way to the employment exchange." His voice boomed loud again, "and how about *you*?"

Jon Venex chuckled at his friend's frank approach to life. "It's just been the old routine with me, a run of odd jobs until I got sideswiped by a bus—it fractured my knee bearing. The only job I could get with a bad leg was feeding slops to pigs. Earned enough to fix the knee—and here *I* am."

Alec jerked his thumb at a rust colored, three-foot tall robot that had come up quietly beside him. "If you think you've got trouble take a look at Dik here, that's no coat of paint on him. Dik Dryer, meet Jon Venex an old buddy of mine."

Jon bent over to shake the little Mech's hand. His eye shutters dilated as he realized what he had thought was a coat of paint was a thin layer of rust that coated Dik's metal body. Alec scratched a shiny

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path in the rust with his finger tip. His voice was suddenly serious.

"Dik was designed for operation in the Martian desert. It's as dry as a fossil bone there so his skinflint company cut corners on the stainless steel.

When they went bankrupt he was sold to a firm here in the city. After awhile the rust started to eat in and slow him down, they gave Dik his contract and threw him out."

The small robot spoke for the first time, his voice grated and scratched. "Nobody will hire me like this, but I can't get repaired until I get a job." His arms squeaked and grated as he moved them. "I'm going by the Robot Free Clinic again today, they said they might be able to do something."

Alec Diger rumbled in his deep chest. "Don't put too much faith in those people. They're great at giving out tenth-credit oil capsules or a little free wire—but don't depend on them for anything important."

It was six now, the robots were pushing through the doors into the silent streets. They joined the crowd moving out, Jon slowing his stride so his shorter friends could keep pace. Dik Dryer moved with a jerking, irregular motion, his voice as uneven as the motion of his body.

"Jon—Venex, I don't recognize your family name. Something to do —with Venus—perhaps."

"Venus is right, Venus Experimental—there are only twenty-two of us in the family. We have waterproof, pressure resistant bodies for working down on the ocean bottom. The basic idea was all right, we did our part, only there wasn't enough money in the channel dredging contract to keep us all working. I bought out my original contract at half price and became a free robot."

Dik vibrated his rusted diaphragm. "Being free isn't all it should be. I some—times wish the Robot Equality Act hadn't been passed. I would just l-love to be owned by a nice rich company with a machine shop and a—mountain of replacement parts."

"You don't really mean that Dik," Alec Diger clamped a heavy black arm across his shoulders. "Things aren't perfect now, we know that, but it's certainly a lot better than the old days, we were just hunks of machinery then. Used twenty-four hours a day until we were worn out and then thrown in the junk pile. No thanks, I'll take my chances with things as they are."

Jon and Alec turned into the employment exchange, saying good-by to Dik who went on slowly down the street. They pushed up the crowded ramp and joined the line in front of the registration desk. The bulletin board next to the desk held a scattering of white slips announcing job openings. A clerk was pinning up new additions.

Venex scanned them with his eyes, stopping at one circled in red.

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ROBOTS NEEDED IN THESE CATEGORIES. APPLY AT ONCE TO CHAINJET, LTD., 1219 BROADWAY

Fasten
Flyer
Atommel
Filmer
Venex

Jon rapped excitedly on Alec Diger's neck. "Look there, a job in my own specialty—I can get my old pay rate! See you back at the hotel tonight—and good luck in your job hunting."

Alec waved good-by. "Let's hope the job's as good as you think, I never trust those things until I have my credits in my hand."

Jon walked quickly from the employment exchange, his long legs eating up the blocks. *Good old Alec, he didn't believe in anything he couldn't touch. Perhaps he was right, but why try to be unhappy. The world wasn't too bad this morning—his leg worked fine, prospects of a good job—he hadn't felt this cheerful since the day he was activated.*

Turning the corner at a brisk pace he collided with a man coming from the opposite direction. Jon had stopped on the instant, but there wasn't time to jump aside. The obese individual jarred against him and fell to the ground. From the height of elation to the depths of despair in an instant—he had injured a *human being!*

He bent to help the man to his feet, but the other would have none of that. He evaded the friendly hand and screeched in a high pitched voice.

"Officer, officer-police . . . HELP! I've been attacked—a mad robot . . . HELP!"

A crowd was gathering—staying at a respectful distance—but making an angry muttering noise. Jon stood motionless, his head reeling at the enormity of what he had done. A policeman pushed his way through the crowd.

"Seize him officer, shoot him down . . . he struck me . . . almost killed me . . ." The man shook with rage, his words thickening to a senseless babble.

The policeman had his .75 recoiless revolver out and pressed against Jon's side.

"This *man* has charged you with a serious crime, *grease-can.* I'm taking you into the stationhouse—to talk about it." He looked around nervously, waving his gun to open a path through the tightly packed crowd. They moved back grudgingly, with murmurs of disapproval.

Jon's thoughts swirled in tight circles. How did a catastrophe like this happen, where was it going to end? He didn't dare tell the truth, that would mean he was calling the man a liar. There had been six robots power-lined in the city since the first of the year. If he dared speak in his own defense there would be a jumper to the street lighting circuit and a seventh burnt out hulk in the police morgue.

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A feeling of resignation swept through him, there was no way out. If the man pressed charges it would mean a term of penal servitude, though it looked now as if he would never live to reach the court. The papers had been whipping up a lot of anti-robe feeling, you could feel it behind the angry voices, see it in the narrowed eyes and clenched fists. The crowd was slowly changing into a mob, a mindless mob as yet, but capable of turning on him at any moment.

"What's goin' on here . . . ?", it was a booming voice, with a quality that dragged at the attention of the crowd.

A giant cross-continent freighter was parked at the curb. The driver swung down from the cab and pushed his way through the people. The policeman shifted his gun as the man strode up to him.

"That's my robot you got there Jack, don't put any holes in him!" He turned on the man who had been shouting accusations. "Fatty here, is the world's biggest liar. The robot was standing here waiting for me to park the truck. Fatty must be as blind as he is stupid, I saw the whole thing. He knocks himself down walking into the robe, then starts hollering for the cops."

The other man could take no more. His face crimson with anger he rushed toward the trucker, his fists swinging in ungainly circles. They never landed, the truck driver put a meaty hand on the other's face and seated him on the sidewalk for the second time.

The onlookers roared with laughter, the power-lining and the robot were forgotten. The fight was between two men now, the original cause had slipped from their minds. Even the policeman allowed himself a small smile as he holstered his gun and stepped forward to separate the men.

The trucker turned towards Jon with a scowl.

"Come on you aboard the truck —you've caused me enough trouble for one day. What a junkcan!"

The crowd chuckled as he pushed Jon ahead of him into the truck and slammed the door behind them. Jamming the starter with his thumb he gunned the thunderous diesels into life and pulled out into the traffic.

Jon moved his jaw, but there were no words to come out. Why had this total stranger helped him, what could he say to show his appreciation? He knew that all humans weren't robe-haters, why it was even rumored that some humans treated robots as *equals* instead of machines. The driver must be one of these mythical individuals, there was no other way to explain his actions.

Driving carefully with one hand the man reached up behind the dash and drew out a thin, plastikoid booklet. He handed it to Jon who quickly scanned the title, "*Robot Slaves in a World Economy.*" by Philpott Asimov II.

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"If you're caught reading that thing they'll execute you on the spot. Better stick it between the insulation on your generator, you can always burn it if you're picked up.

"Read it when you're alone, it's got a lot of things in it that you know nothing about. Robots aren't really inferior to humans, in fact they're superior in most things. There is even a little history in there to show that robots aren't the first ones to be treated as second class citizens. You may find it a little hard to believe, but human beings once treated each other just the way they treat robots now. That's one of the reasons I'm active in this movement—sort of like the fellow who was burned helping others stay away from the fire."

He smiled a warm, friendly smile in Jon's direction, the whiteness of his teeth standing out against the rich ebony brown of his features.

"I'm heading towards US-1, can I drop you anywheres on the way?"

"The Chainjet Building please—I'm applying for a job."

They rode the rest of the way in silence. Before he opened the door the driver shook hands with Jon.

"Sorry about calling you *Junkcan,* but the crowd expected it." He didn't look back as he drove away.

Jon had to wait a half hour for his turn, but the receptionist finally signalled him towards the door of the interviewer's room. He stepped in quickly and turned to face the man seated at the transplastic desk; an upset little man with permanent worry wrinkles stamped in his forehead. The little man shoved the papers on the desk around angrily, occasionally making crabbed little notes on the margins. He flashed a birdlike glance up at Jon.

"Yes, yes, be quick. What is it you want?"

"You posted a help wanted notice, I—"

The man cut him off with a wave of his hand. "All right let me see your ID tag . . . quickly, there are others waiting."

Jon thumbed the tag out of his waist slot and handed it across the desk. The interviewer read the code number, then began running his finger down a long list of similar figures. He stopped suddenly and looked sideways at Jon from under his lowered lids.

"You have made a mistake, we have no opening for you."

Jon began to explain to the man that the notice had requested his specialty, but he was waved to silence. As the interviewer handed back the tag he slipped a card out from under the desk blotter and held it in front of Jon's eyes. He held it there for only an instant, knowing that the written message was recorded instantly by the robot's photographic vision and eidetic memory. The card dropped into the ash tray and flared into embers at the touch of the man's pencil-heater.

Jon stuffed the ID tag back into the slot and read over the message

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on the card as he walked down the stairs to the street. There were six lines of typewritten copy with no signature.

To Venex Robot: You are urgently needed on a top secret company project. There are suspected informers in the main office, so you are being hired in this unusual manner. Go at once to 787 Washington Street and ask for Mr. Coleman.

Jon felt an immense sensation of relief. For a moment there, he was sure the job had been a false lead. He saw nothing unusual in the method of hiring. The big corporations were immensely jealous of their research discoveries and went to great lengths to keep them secret—at the same time resorting to any means to ferret out their business rivals' secrets. There might still be a chance to get this job.

The burly bulk of a lifter was moving back and forth in the gloom of the ancient warehouse stacking crates in ceiling high rows. Jon called to him, the robot swung up his forklift and rolled over on noiseless tires. When Jon questioned him he indicated a stairwell against the rear wall.

"Mr. Coleman's office is down in back, the door is marked." The lifter put his fingertips against Jon's ear pick-ups and lowered his voice to the merest shadow of a whisper. It would have been inaudible to human ears, but Jon could hear him easily, the sounds being carried through the metal of the other's body.

"He's the meanest man you ever met—he hates robots so be *ever* so polite. If you can use "sir" five times in one sentence you're perfectly safe."

Jon swept the shutter over one eye tube in a conspiratorial wink, the large mech did the same as he rolled away. Jon turned and went down the dusty stairwell and knocked gently on Mr. Coleman's door.

Coleman was a plump little individual in a conservative purple and yellow business suit. He kept glancing from Jon to the Robot General Catalog checking the Venex specifications listed there. Seemingly satisfied he slammed the book shut.

"Gimme your tag and back against that wall to get measured."

Jon laid his ID tag on the desk and stepped towards the wall. "Yes sir, here it is sir." Two "sir" on that one, not bad for the first sentence. He wondered idly if he could put five of them in one sentence without the man knowing he was being made a fool of.

He became aware of the danger an instant too late. The current surged through the powerful electromagnet behind the plaster flattening his metal body helplessly against the wall. Coleman was almost dancing with glee.

"We got him Druce, he's mashed flatter than a stinking tin-can on a rock, can't move a motor. Bring

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that junk in here and let's get him ready."

Druce had a mechanic's coveralls on over his street suit and a tool box slung under one arm. He carried a little black metal can at arms length, trying to get as far from it as possible. Coleman shouted at him with annoyance.

"That bomb can't go off until it's armed, stop acting like a child. Put it on that grease-can's leg and *quick!*"

Grumbling under his breath Druce spot welded the metal flanges of the bomb onto Jon's leg a few inches above his knee. Coleman tugged at it to be certain it was secure, then twisted a knob in the side and pulled out a glistening length of pin. There was a cold little click from inside the mechanism as it armed itself.

Jon could do nothing except watch, even his vocal diaphragm was locked by the magnetic field. He had more than a suspicion however that he was involved in something other than a "secret business deal." He cursed his own stupidity for walking blindly into the situation.

The magnetic field cut off and he instantly raced his extensor motors to leap forward. Coleman took a plastic box out of his pocket and held his thumb over a switch inset into its top.

"Don't make any quick moves junk-yard, this little transmitter is keyed to a receiver in that bomb on your leg. One touch of my thumb, up you go in a cloud of smoke and come down in a shower of nuts and bolts." He signalled to Druce who opened a closet door. "And in case you want to be heroic, just think of him."

Coleman jerked his thumb at the sodden shape on the floor; a filthily attired man of indistinguishable age whose only interesting feature was the black bomb strapped tightly across his chest. He peered unseeingly from red-rimmed eyes and raised the almost empty whiskey bottle to his mouth. Coleman kicked the door shut.

"He's just some Bowery bum we dragged in Venex, but that doesn't make any difference to you, does it? He's human—and a robot can't kill *anybody!* That rummy has a bomb on him tuned to the same frequency as yours, if you don't play ball with us he gets a two-foot hole blown in his chest."

Coleman was right, Jon didn't dare make any false moves. All of his early mental training as well as Circuit 92 sealed inside his brain case would prevent him from harming a human being. He felt trapped, caught by these people for some unknown purpose.

Coleman had pushed back a tarpaulin to disclose a ragged hole in the concrete floor, the opening extended into the earth below. He waved Jon over.

"The tunnel is in good shape for about thirty feet, then you'll find a fall. Clean all the rock and dirt out until you break through into

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the storm sewer, then come back. And you better be alone. If you tip the cops both you and the old stew go out together—now move."

The shaft had been dug recently and shored with packing crates from the warehouse overhead. It ended abruptly in a wall of fresh sand and stone. Jon began shoveling it into the little wheelbarrow they had given him.

He had emptied four barrow loads and was filling the fifth when he uncovered the hand, a robot's hand made of green metal. He turned his headlight power up and examined the hand closely, there could be no doubt about it. These gaskets on the joints, the rivet pattern at the base of the thumb meant only one thing, it was the dismembered hand of a Venex robot.

Quickly, yet gently, he shoveled away the rubble behind the hand and unearthed the rest of the robot. The torso was crushed and the power circuits shorted, battery acid was dripping from an ugly rent in the side. With infinite care Jon snapped the few remaining wires that joined the neck to the body and laid the green head on the barrow. It stared at him like a skull, the shutters completely dilated, but no glow of life from the tubes behind them.

He was scraping the mud from the number on the battered chest-plate when Druce lowered himself into the tunnel and flashed the brilliant beam of a hand-spot down its length.

"Stop playing with that junk and get digging—or you'll end up the same as him. This tunnel has gotta be through by tonight."

Jon put the dismembered parts on the barrow with the sand and rock and pushed the whole load back up the tunnel, his thoughts running in unhappy circles. A dead robot was a terrible thing, and one of his family too. But there was something wrong about this robot, something that was quite inexplicable, the number on the plate had been "17," yet he remembered only too well the day that a water-shorted motor had killed Venex 17 in the Orange Sea.

It took Jon four hours to drive the tunnel as far as the ancient granite wall of the storm sewer. Druce gave him a short pinch bar and he levered out enough of the big blocks to make a hole large enough to let him through into the sewer.

When he climbed back into the office he tried to look casual as he dropped the pinch bar to the floor by his feet and seated himself on the pile of rubble in the corner. He moved around to make a comfortable seat for himself and his fingers grabbed the severed neck of Venex 17.

Coleman swiveled around in his chair and squinted at the wall clock. He checked the time against his tie-pin watch, with a grunt of satisfaction he turned back and stabbed a finger at Jon.

"Listen you green junk-pile, at

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1900 hours you're going to do a job, and there aren't going to be any slip ups. You go down that sewer and into the Hudson River. The outlet is under water, so you won't be seen from the docks. Climb down to the bottom and walk 200 yards north, that should put you just under a ship. Keep your eyes open, *but don't show any lights!* About halfway down the keel of the ship you'll find a chain hanging.

"Climb the chain, pull loose the box that's fastened to the hull at the top and bring it back here. No mistakes—or you know what happens."

Jon nodded his head. His busy fingers had been separating the wires in the amputated neck. When they had been straightened and put into a row he memorized their order with one flashing glance.

He ran over the color code in his mind and compared it with the memorized leads. The twelfth wire was the main cranial power lead, number six was the return wire.

With his precise touch he separated these two from the pack and glanced idly around the room. Druce was dozing on a chair in the opposite corner, Coleman was talking on the phone, his voice occasionally rising in a petulant whine. This wasn't interfering with his attention to Jon—and the radio switch still held tightly in left hand.

Jon's body blocked Coleman's vision, as long as Druce stayed asleep he would be able to work on the head unobserved. He activated a relay in his forearm and there was a click as the waterproof cover on an exterior socket swung open. This was a power outlet from his battery that was used to operate motorized tools and lights underwater.

If Venex 17's head had been severed for less than three weeks he could reactivate it. Every robot had a small storage battery inside his skull, if the power to the brain was cut off the battery would provide the minimum standby current to keep the brain alive. The robe would be unconscious until full power was restored.

Jon plugged the wires into his arm-outlet and slowly raised the current to operating level. There was a tense moment of waiting, then 17's eye shutters suddenly closed. When they opened again the eye tubes were glowing warmly. They swept the room with one glance then focused on Jon.

The right shutter clicked shut while the other began opening and closing in rapid fashion. It was International code—being sent as fast as the solenoid could be operated. Jon concentrated on the message.

Telephone—call emergency operator—tell her "signal 14" help will

—The shutter stopped in the middle of a code group, the light of reason dying from the eyes.

For one instant Jon's heart leaped in panic, until he realized that 17 had deliberately cut the power.

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Druce's harsh voice rasped in his ear.

"What you doing with that? None of your funny robot tricks, I know your kind, plotting all kinds of things in them tin domes." His voice trailed off into a stream of incomprehensible profanity. With sudden spite he lashed his foot out and sent 17's head crushing against the wall.

The dented, green head rolled to a stop at Jon's feet, the face staring up at him in mute agony. It was only Circuit 92 that prevented him from injuring a *human*. As his motors revved up to send him hurtling forward the control relays clicked open. He sank against the debris, paralyzed for the instant. As soon as the rush of anger was gone he would regain control of his body.

They stood as if frozen in a tableau. The robot slumped backward, the man leaning forward, his face twisted with unreasoning hatred. The head lay between them like a symbol of death.

Coleman's voice cut through the air of tenseness like a knife.

"*Druce*, stop playing with the grease-can and get down to the main door to let Little Willy and his Junk-brokers in. You can have it all to yourself afterward."

The angry man turned reluctantly, but pushed out of the door at Coleman's annoyed growl. Jon sat down against the wall, his mind sorting out the few facts with lightning precision. There was no room in his thoughts for Druce, the man had become just one more factor in a complex problem.

Call the emergency operator—that meant this was no local matter, responsible authorities must be involved. Only the government could be behind a thing as major as this. Signal 14—that inferred a complex set of arrangements, forces that could swing into action at a moment's notice. There was no indication where this might lead, but the only thing to do was to get out of here and make that phone call. And quick. Druce was bringing in more people, junk-brokers, whatever they were. Any action that he took would have to be done before they returned.

Even as Jon followed this train of logic his fingers were busy. Palming a wrench, he was swiftly loosening the main retaining nut on his hip joint. It dropped free in his hand, only the pivot pin remained now to hold his leg on. He climbed slowly to his feet and moved towards Coleman's desk.

"Mr. Coleman, sir, it's time to go down to the ship now, should I leave now, sir?"

Jon spoke the words slowly as he walked forward, apparently going to the door, but angling at the same time towards the plump man's desk.

"You got thirty minutes yet, go sit—*say . . .* !"

The words were cut off. Fast as a human reflex is, it is the barest crawl compared to the lightning

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action of electronic reflex. At the instant Coleman was first aware of Jon's motion, the robot had finished his leap and lay sprawled across the desk, his leg off at the hip and clutched in his hand.

"YOU'LL KILL YOURSELF IF YOU TOUCH THE BUTTON!"

The words were part of the calculated plan. Jon bellowed them in the startled man's ear as he stuffed the dismembered leg down the front of the man's baggy slacks. It had the desired effect, Coleman's finger stabbed at the button but stopped before it made contact. He stared down with bulging eyes at the little black box of death peeping out of his waistband.

Jon hadn't waited for the reaction. He pushed backward from the desk and stopped to grab the stolen pinch-bar off the floor. A mighty one-legged leap brought him to the locked closet; he stabbed the bar into the space between the door and frame and heaved.

Coleman was just starting to struggle the bomb out of his pants when the action was over. The closet open, Jon seized the heavy strap holding the second bomb on the rummy's chest and snapped it like a thread. He threw the bomb into Coleman's corner, giving the man one more thing to worry about. It had cost him a leg, but Jon had escaped the bomb threat without injuring a human. Now he had to get to a phone and make that call.

Coleman stopped tugging at the bomb and plunged his hand into the desk drawer for a gun. The returning men would block the door soon, the only other exit from the room was a frosted-glass window that opened onto the mammoth bay of the warehouse.

Jon Venex plunged through the window in a welter of flying glass. The heavy thud of a recoiless .75 came from the room behind him and a foot long section of metal window frame leaped outward. Another slug screamed by the robot's head as he scrambled toward the rear door of the warehouse.

He was a bare thirty feet away from the back entrance when the giant door hissed shut on silent rollers. All the doors would have closed at the same time, the thud of running feet indicated that they would be guarded as well. Jon hopped a section of packing cases and crouched out of sight.

He looked up over his head, there stretched a webbing of steel supports, crossing and recrossing until they joined the flat expanse of the roof. To human eyes the shadows there deepened into obscurity, but the infra-red from a network of steam pipes gave Jon all the illumination he needed.

The men would be quartering the floor of the warehouse soon, his only chance to escape recapture or death would be over their heads. Besides this, he was hampered by the loss of his leg. In the rafters he could use his arms for faster and easier travel.

Jon was just pulling himself up

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to one of the topmost cross beams when a hoarse shout from below was followed by a stream of bullets. They tore through the thin roof, one slug clanged off the steel beam under his body. Waiting until three of the newcomers had started up a nearby ladder, Jon began to quietly work his way towards the back of the building.

Safe for the moment, he took stock of his position. The men were spread out through the building, it could only be a matter of time before they found him. The doors were all locked and—he had made a complete circuit of the building to be sure—there were no windows that he could force—the windows were bolted as well. If he could call the emergency operator the unknown friends of Venex 17 might come to his aid. This, however, was out of the question. The only phone in the building was on Coleman's desk. He had traced the leads to make sure.

His eyes went automatically to the cables above his head. Plastic gaskets were set in the wall of the building, through them came the power and phone lines. The phone line! That was all he needed to make a call.

With smooth, fast motions he reached up and scratched a section of wire bare. He laughed to himself as he slipped the little microphone out of his left ear. Now he was half deaf as well as half lame—he was literally giving himself to this cause. He would have to remember the pun to tell Alec Diger later, if there was a later. Alec had a profound weakness for puns.

Jon attached jumpers to the mike and connected them to the bare wire. A touch of the ammeter showed that no one was on the line. He waited a few moments to be sure he had a dial tone then sent the eleven carefully spaced pulses that would connect him with the local operator. He placed the mike close to his mouth.

"Hello operator. Hello operator. I cannot hear you so do not answer. Call the emergency operator—signal 14, I repeat—signal 14."

Jon kept repeating the message until the searching men began to approach his position. He left the mike connected—the men wouldn't notice it in the dark but the open line would give the unknown powers his exact location. Using his fingertips he did a careful traverse on an *I* beam to an alcove in the farthest corner of the room. Escape was impossible, all he could do was stall for time.

"Mr. Coleman, I'm sorry I ran away." With the volume on full his voice rolled like thunder from the echoing walls.

He could see the men below twisting their heads vainly to find the source.

"If you let me come back and don't kill me I will do your work. I was afraid of the bomb, but now I am afraid of the guns." It sounded a little infantile, but he was pretty sure none of those present

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had any sound knowledge of robotic intelligence.

"Please let me come back . . . sir!" He had almost forgotten the last word, so he added another "Please, sir!" to make up.

Coleman needed that package under the boat very badly, he would promise anything to get it. Jon had no doubts as to his eventual fate, all he could hope to do was kill time in the hopes that the phone message would bring aid.

"Come on down Junky, I won't be mad at you—if you follow directions." Jon could hear the hidden anger in his voice, the unspoken hatred for a robe who dared lay hands on him.

The descent wasn't difficult, but Jon did it slowly with much apparent discomfort. He hopped into the center of the floor—leaning on the cases as if for support. Coleman and Druce were both there as well as a group of hard-eyed newcomers. They raised their guns at his approach but Coleman stopped them with a gesture.

"This is *my* robe boys, I'll see to it that he's happy."

He raised his gun and shot Jon's remaining leg off. Twisted around by the blast Jon fell helplessly to the floor. He looked up into the smoking mouth of the .75.

"Very smart for a tin-can, but not smart enough. We'll get the junk on the boat some other way, some way that won't mean having you around under foot." Death looked out of his narrowed eyes.

Less than two minutes had passed since Jon's call. The watchers must have been keeping 24 hour stations waiting for Venex 17's phone message.

The main door went down with the sudden scream of torn steel. A whippet tank crunched over the wreck and covered the group with its multiple pom-poms. They were an instant too late, Coleman pulled the trigger.

Jon saw the tensing trigger finger and pushed hard against the floor. His head rolled clear but the bullet tore through his shoulder. Coleman didn't have a chance for a second shot, there was a fizzling hiss from the tank and the riot ports released a flood of tear gas. The stricken men never saw the gas-masked police that poured in from the street.

Jon lay on the floor of the police station while a tech made temporary repairs on his leg and shoulder. Across the room Venex 17 was moving his new body with evident pleasure.

"Now this really feels like *something!* I was sure my time was up when that land slip caught me. But maybe I ought to start from the beginning." He stamped across the room and shook Jon's inoperable hand.

"The name is Wil Counter-4951L3, not that *that* means much any more. I've worn so many different bodies that I forget what I originally looked like. I went right from factory-school to a police

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training school—and I have been on the job ever since—Force of Detectives, Sergeant Jr. grade, Investigation Department. I spend most of my time selling candy bars or newspapers, or serving drinks in crumb joints. Gather information, make reports and keep tab on guys for other departments.

"This last job—and I'm sorry I had to use a Venex identity, I don't think I brought any dishonor to your family—I was on loan to the Customs department. Seems a ring was bringing uncut junk—heroin—into the country. F. B. I. tabbed all the operators here, but no one knew how the stuff got in. When Coleman, he's the local bigshot, called the agencies for an underwater robot, I was packed into a new body and sent running.

"I alerted the squad as soon as I started the tunnel, but the damned thing caved in on me before I found out what ship was doing the carrying. From there on you know what happened.

"Not knowing I was out of the game the squad sat tight and waited. The hop merchants saw a half million in snow sailing back to the old country so they had you dragged in as a replacement. You made the phone call and the cavalry rushed in at the last moment to save two robots from a rusty grave."

Jon, who had been trying vainly to get in a word, saw his chance as Wil Counter turned to admire the reflection of his new figure in a window.

"You shouldn't be telling me those things—about your police investigations and department operations. Isn't this information supposed to be secret? Specially from robots!"

"Of course it is!" was Wil's airy answer. "Captain Edgecombe—he's the head of my department—is an expert on all kinds of blackmail. I'm supposed to tell you so much confidential police business that you'll have to either join the department or be shot as a possible informer." His laughter wasn't shared by the bewildered Jon.

"Truthfully Jon, we need you and can use you. Robes that can think fast and act fast aren't easy to find. After hearing about the tricks you pulled in that warehouse the Captain swore to decapitate me permanently if I couldn't get you to join up. Do you need a job? Long hours, short pay—but guaranteed to never get boring."

Wil's voice was suddenly serious. "You saved my life Jon—those snowbirds would have left me in that sandpile until—all hell froze over. I'd like you for a mate, I think we could get along well together." The gay note came back into his voice, "And besides that, I may be able to save your life some day—I hate owing debts."

The tech was finished, he snapped his tool box shut and left. Jon's shoulder motor was repaired now, he sat up. When they shook hands this time it was a firm clasp.

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The kind you know will last awhile.

Jon stayed in an empty cell that night. It was gigantic compared to the hotel and barrack rooms he was used to. He wished that he had his missing legs so he could take a little walk up and down the cell. He would have to wait until the morning. They were going to fix him up then before he started the new job.

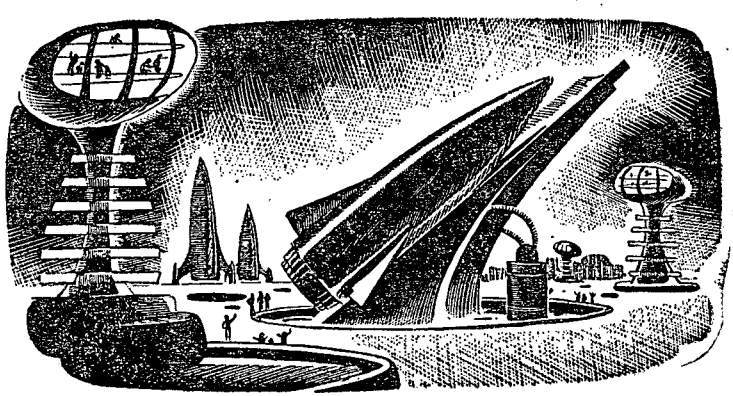
He had recorded his testimony earlier and the impossible events of the past day kept whirling around in his head. He would think about it some other time, right now all he wanted to do was let his overworked circuits cool down, if he only had something to read, to focus his attention on. Then, with a start, he remembered the booklet. Everything had moved so fast that the earlier incident with the truck-driver had slipped his mind completely.

He carefully worked it out from behind the generator shielding and opened the first page of *Robot Slaves in a World Economy*. A card slipped from between the pages and he read the short message on it.

PLEASE DESTROY THIS CARD AFTER READING

If you think there is truth in this book and would like to hear more, come to Room B, 107 George St. any Tuesday at 5 P.M.

The card flared briefly and was gone. But he knew that it wasn't only a perfect memory that would make him remember that message.



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the golden pyramid

by . . . Sam Moskowitz

It was an unusually calm day for Mars—so far. . . .

IT WAS an unusually calm day for Mars. Scarcely a particle of sand floated in the thin air and nowheres was the horizon tinged with the red that generally heralded a desert sandstorm.

Two space-suited figures, both holding clicking geiger counters, were painstakingly slipping and sliding through the treacherous sands, making ever widening circles around a small space ship.

"I think we're almost on top of it, Jim," the tallest and oldest of the men barked into his radio transmitter. He cursed through a week's growth of beard as he slid and almost fell in the slippery red dust.

"The thing that bothers me," the younger man said, "is that the radiation seems rather weak for an important deposit of uranium."

The older man didn't answer. The stepped-up tempo of his instrument told its own story.

There was a whirring sound. Suddenly, a section of sand almost under their feet began to cave in.

"What the hell!" the older man shouted as he made an impressive backward leap of almost fifteen feet, made possible by the fact that a man weighs less than 40% as much on Mars as he does on Earth.

Strange things are to be found in the sands of Mars, strange things that it is not easy to explain, and which cannot be dismissed as just "native things." . . .

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There was a swirl of red dust and a V-shaped snout emerged from the sand followed by a body that was about two feet long and a foot thick. The spade-like snout cut a path ahead while two roughly circular, bumpy appendages, one on either side of the cigar-shaped body, whirled around, propelling it forward much as a caterpillar tread moves a bulldozer.

The geiger counters almost went crazy as the creatures came into full view.

"The blasted thing's radioactive, Bill," the younger man said in astonishment.

The head, except for the snout, had been virtually featureless. Now, a section of the surface near the V-shaped projection slid back for all the world like an opening steel shutter. Through the aperture, an eye, like a many-faceted gleaming crystal, focused on the two men. The shutter-like lid slid back covering the eye except for the tiniest slit. The appendages began to revolve again and the creature headed for the space ship, moving like an old side-wheel steam boat. It circled the ship once, leaving a permanent wake behind it. Finally it stopped, opened its slit wide and just stared at the ship as though hypnotized.

"A Martian sand swimmer," the older man finally explained. "A few of them were spotted when the first expeditions landed, practically nothing is known about them, since they're difficult to capture. Always located the same way; set the counters a clickin'. There's one theory they're not flesh and blood but some kind of silicon-metallic life."

"Are they dangerous?" the younger man asked.

The older man started to shrug, stopped and pointed at the horizon. The sky was turning red and a gathering dark mass, propelled by winds of hurricane force, seemed to gallop across the desert towards them.

"Quick!" the older man ordered. "Into that outcropping of rocks. We'll never make the ship before it hits us."

Utilizing grotesque hops the two men floundered towards a nearby rock formation. They dived into a natural cave only seconds ahead of a shrieking maelstrom of sand which reduced outside visibility to zero.

The younger man wiped the red dust from his eye plate. Then gave a little shout and pounced upon an object on the floor of the cave.

Making whooping noises he straightened up, a gleaming, golden pyramid, about four inches high, resting in the palm of his gloved hand.

"A Martian artifact," the older man gasped. "It's priceless. Proof that a civilization once existed on this planet—looks like cast gold."

"Remember, I found it," the younger man emphasized. There was a tinge of violet on his face but it was hard to say whether it was the result of enthusiasm or the reflection on his viewing plate from the red sands. "I don't have to

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share the proceeds of what the museums will give me for this with you. It isn't the same as a uranium strike."

"The devil you say," the older man spat, advancing menacingly. "Share and share alike, that was our agreement and you're going to stick by it if I . . ."

"The agreement was for uranium. Nothing was said about something like this," the younger man replied moving towards the mouth of the cave.

As quickly as it had arrived, the sand storm retreated until it became a thin, red haze on the horizon. The air cleared and abruptly the ship was visible outside.

"Now look here," the older man reasoned. "That relic must be worth a fortune. There's plenty in it for both of us."

The younger man instead of replying began plowing through the sand towards the space ship, the golden pyramid clutched in his electrically heated mittens.

"What're you up to?" the older man demanded sharply. "Oh, gonna try to leave me here are you? Well, we'll see about that."

The two men began a bizarre race for the ship. Making fantastic leaps against the lighter gravity and landing to slide face forward in the slippery sands. Then picking themselves up and starting for the ship again.

The younger man reached the air lock first. He reached inside and pressed the button to close it. The fine sand that the storm had blown into the grooves of the lock slowed down its rate of closing and gave the older man time to slip past before it shut. Even as the air pressure began to rise in the cabin of the ship, he threw himself upon the younger man and the two of them battled furiously but ineffectually. Their reduced weight coupled with the thickly insulated suits, deprived the blows of any authority.

A tinny crash interrupted the argument. They simultaneously swung in the direction of the sound. Two mouths gaped as one in amazement.

The strange sand swimmer that had appeared out of the desert sands had evidently entered the lock of the ship while they were in the cave. It now had rammed its ploughlike head through the thin metal skin of the inner wall of the ship exposing a layer of lead insulation.

At the same time the older man noted that his companion's face was flushed with violet. His anger melted with understanding. "Kid," he said almost kindly, "you've got radiation fever."

The younger man wasn't listening. He was shouting and gesturing. The strange creature was apparently eating the lead insulation in the walls of the ship. It was grinding away with steel-hard rotary teeth, consuming quantities of lead at an alarming rate.

The young man snatched a sam-

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pling of ore out of a leather bag and fired it at the creature. It bounced off, ricocheting about the room from the force of the throw. The creature scarcely noticed.

Enraged, the young man dashed over and directed a powerful kick at the hard surface of the Martian life form. Despite its almost metallic texture, the creature was small and the force of the kick sent it rolling towards the lock.

Before it could recover, the young man raced over and gave it another kick that rolled it almost to the lock. The older man pushed the button that opened the lock and a third kick propelled the creature out on to the desert sand.

The young man grabbed a rocket gun from the wall and pumped a shell at the creature. He missed and the explosion blew up a geyser of sand. Jim tried to grab the gun, but the younger man, his face almost purple with fever, evaded him and brought the butt down alongside his head.

When he came to, the rockets of the ship were a cherry flicker in the sky. He didn't feel angry at the kid. Radiation sickness was something that could hit anyone at anytime. He clicked on his S. O. S. radio signal set. The powerful receivers on Phobos, one of the two moons of Mars, would pick it up and a rescue ship would follow, probably in only a matter of hours.

Suddenly he realized that the sand swimmer was resting quietly in the sand scarcely twelve yards away. Its mid-section had turned a reddish hue and was beginning to glow.

"It can't be possible," he thought to himself. "That crazy thing eats lead and digests it with the use of a radioactive pile in its stomach." It upset all concepts of life and intelligence. The life force that motivated the thing could be compared to a natural atomic engine.

Though consumed by curiosity he stayed his distance. There was no question in his mind that the kid's radiation sickness was the result of close contact with this creature. He didn't intend to get a dose of the same, even though his own radiation tolerance was evidently higher than the kid's.

The glow in the midsection of the creature gradually diminished and then finally died away altogether. The shutterlike lid slid open and the crystal clear eye regarded him. The sand swimmer's limbs began whirring around like tank treads. The head plowed into the sand. In seconds it had disappeared.

Cautiously Jim approached the hole. The soft, sifting sand was already filling it in. Then something caught his eye. He stared a moment, caught his stomach and rolled over and over on the sand convulsed by paroxysms of laughter.

There on the sand. On the sometimes treacherous but occasionally puckish red sands of Mars, the sand swimmer had laid a beautiful, glowing, golden pyramid!

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conquest over time

by . . . Michael Shaara

What was the startling secret of Diomed III that almost caused Travis to lose his life? And who was Lappy? . . .

WHEN the radiogram came in it was 10:28 ship's time and old 29 was exactly 3.4 light years away from Diomed III. Travis threw her wide open and hoped for the best. By 4:10 that same afternoon, minus three burned out generators and fronting a warped ion screen, old 29 touched the atmosphere and began homing down. It was a very tense moment. Somewhere down in that great blue disc below a Mapping Command ship sat in an open field, sending up the beam which was guiding them down. But it was not the Mapping Command that was important. The Mapping Command was always first. What mattered now was to come in second, any kind of second, close or wide, mile or eyelash, but second come hell or high water.

The clouds peeled away. Travis staring anxiously down could see nothing but mist and heavy cloud. He could not help sniffing the air and groaning inwardly. There is no smell quite as expensive as that of burned generators. He could hear the Old Man repeating over and over again—as if Allspace was

"Now this here planet," he said cautiously, "is whacky in a lot of ways. First of all they call it Mert. Just plain Mert. And they live in houses strictly from Dickens, all carriages, no sewers, narrow streets, stuff like that." But that wasn't all. . . . Travis, in reaching Diomed III before any others, found himself waging a one-man fight against more than this; he was bucking the strangest way of life you have ever heard of!

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not one of the richest companies in existence—"burned generators, boy, is burned *money*, and don't you forget it!" Fat chance me forgetting it, Travis thought gloomily, twitching his nostrils. But a moment later he did.

For Diomed III was below him.

And Diomed III was an Open Planet.

It happened less often, nowadays, that the Mapping Command ran across intelligent life, and it was even less often that the intelligent life was humanoid. But when it happened it was an event to remember. For space travel had brought with it two great problems. The first was Contact, the Second was Trade. For many years Man had prohibited contact with intelligent humanoids who did not yet have space travel, on the grounds of the much-discussed Maturity Theory. As time went by, however, and humanoid races were discovered which were biologically identical with Man, and as great swarms of completely alien, often hostile races were also discovered, the Maturity Theory went into discard. A human being, ran the new slogan, is a Human Being, and so came the first great Contact Law, which stated that any humanoid race, regardless of its place on the evolutionary scale, was to be contacted. To be accepted, "yea, welcomed," as the phrase went, into the human community. And following this, of course, there came Trade. For it was the businessmen who had started the whole thing in the first place.

Hence the day of the Open Planet. A humanoid race was discovered by the Mapping Command, the M.C. made its investigation, and then sent out the Word. And every company in the Galaxy, be it monstrous huge or piddling small, made a mad rush to be first on the scene. The Government was very strict about the whole business, the idea being that planets should make their contracts with companies rather than the government itself, so that if any shady business arose the company at fault could be kicked out, and there would be no chance of a general war. Also, went the reasoning, under this system there would be no favorites. Whichever company, no matter its resources, had a ship closest at the time of the call, was the one to get first bargaining rights. Under this setup it was very difficult for any one company to grow too large, or to freeze any of the others out, and quite often a single contract on a single planet was enough to transform a fly-by-night outfit into a major concern.

So that was the basis of the Open Planet, but there the real story has only begun. Winning the race did not always mean winning the contract. It was what you found when you got down that made the job of a Contact Man one of the most hazardous occupations in history. Each new planet was wholly and completely new, there were no

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rules, and what you learned on all the rest meant nothing. You went from a matriarchy which refused absolutely to deal with men (the tenth ship to arrive had a lady doctor and therefore got the contract) to a planet where the earth was sacred and you couldn't dig a hole in it so mining was out, to a planet which considered your visit the end of the world and promptly committed mass suicide. The result of this was that a successful Contact Man had to be a remarkable man to begin with: a combined speed demon, sociologist, financier, diplomat and geologist, all in one. It was a job in which successful men not only made fortunes, they made legends. It was that way with Pat Travis.

Sitting at the viewscreen, watching the clouds whip by and the first dark clots of towns beginning to shape below, Travis thought about the legend. He was a tall, frail, remarkably undernourished looking man with large soft brown eyes. He did not look like a legend and he knew it, and, being a man of great pride, it bothered him. More and more, as the years went by, his competitors blamed his success on luck. It was not Pat Travis that was the legend, it was the luck of Pat Travis. Over the years he had learned not to argue about it, and it was only during these past few months, when his luck had begun to slip, that he mentioned it at all.

Luck no more makes a legend, he knew, than raw courage makes a fighter. But legends die quick in deep space, and his own had been a-dying for a good long while now, while other lesser men, the luck all theirs, plucked planet after planet from under his nose. Now at the viewscreen he glanced dolefully across the room at his crew: the curly-headed young Dahlinger and the profound Mr. Trippe. In contrast to his own weary relaxation, both of the young men were tensed and anxious, peering into the screen. They had come to learn under the great Pat Travis, but in the last few months what they seemed to have learned most was Luck: if you happened to be close you were lucky and if you weren't you weren't. But if they were to get anywhere in this business, Travis knew, they had to learn that luck, more often than not, follows the man who burns his generators . . .

He stopped thinking abruptly as a long yellow field came into view. He saw silver flashing in the sun, and his heart jumped into his throat. Old 29 settled fast. One ship or two? In the distance he could see the gray jumbled shapes of a low-lying city. The sun was shining warmly, it was spring on Diomed III, and across the field a blue river sparkled, but Travis paid no attention. There was only one silver gleam. Still he waited, not thinking. But when they were close enough he saw that he was right. The Mapping Command ship

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was alone. Old 29, burned generators and all, had won the race.

"My boys," he said gravely, turning to the crew, "Pat Travis rides again!" But they were already around him, pounding him on the back. He turned happily back to the screen, for the first time beginning to admire the view. By jing, he thought, what a lovely day!

That was his first mistake.

It was not a lovely day.

It was absolutely miserable.

Travis had his first pang of doubt when he stepped out of the ship.

The field was empty, not a native in sight. But Dahlinger was out before him, standing waist high in the grass and heaving deep lungfuls of the flower-scented air. He yelled that he could already smell the gold.

"I say, Trav," Trippe said thoughtfully from behind him, "where's the fatted calf?"

"In this life," Travis said warily, "one is often disappointed." A figure climbed out of a port over at the Mapping Command ship and came walking slowly toward them. Travis recognized him and grinned.

"Hey, Hort."

"Hey Trav," Horton replied from a distance. But he did not say anything else. He came forward with an odd look on his face. Travis did not understand. Ed Horton was an old buddy and Ed Horton should be happy to see him. Travis felt his second pang. This one went deep.

"Anybody beat us here?"

"No. You're the first, Trav."

Dahlinger whooped. Travis relaxed slightly and even the glacial Trippe could not control a silly grin.

Horton caught a whiff of air from the open lock.

"Burned generators? You must've come like hell." His face showed his respect. Between burning a generator and blowing one entirely there is only a microscopic distance, and it takes a very steady pilot indeed to get the absolute most out of his generators without also spreading himself and his ship over several cubic miles of exploded space.

"Like a striped-tailed ape," Dahlinger chortled. "Man, you should see the boss handle a ship. I thought every second we were going to explode in technicolor."

"Well," Horton said feebly. "Burned generators. Shame."

He lowered his eyes and began toeing the ground. Travis felt suddenly ill.

"What's the matter, Hort?"

Horton shrugged. "I hate like heck to be the one to tell you, Trav, but seein' as I know you, they sent me—"

"Tell me what?" Now Dahlinger and Trippe both realized it and were suddenly silent.

"Well, if only you'd taken a little more time. But not you, not old Pat Travis. By damn, Pat, you came

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in here like a downhill locomotive, it aint my fault—"

"Hort, straighten it out. What's not your fault?"

Horton sighed.

"Listen, it's a long story. I've got a buggy over here to take you into town. They're puttin' you up at a hotel so you can look the place over. I'll tell you on the way in."

"The heck with that," Dahlinger said indignantly, "we want to see the *man*."

"You're not goin' to see the man, sonny," Horton said patiently, "You are, as a matter of fact, the last people on the planet the man wants to see right now."

Dahlinger started to say something but Travis shut him up. He told Trippe to stay with the ship and took Dahlinger with him. At the end of the field was a carriage straight out of Seventeenth Century England. And the things that drew it—if you closed your eyes—looked reasonably similar to horses. The three men climbed aboard. There was no driver. Horton explained that the 'horses' would head straight for the hotel.

"Well all right," Travis said, "what's the story?"

"Don't turn those baby browns on me," Horton said gloomily, "I would have warned you if I could, but you know the law says we can't show favoritism . . ."

Travis decided the best thing to do was wait with as much patience as possible. After a while Horton had apologized thoroughly and completely, although what had happened was certainly not his fault, and finally got on with the tale.

"Now this here planet," he said cautiously, "is whacky in a lot of ways. First off they call it Mert. Mert. Fine name for a planet. Just plain Mert. And they live in houses strictly from Dickens, all carriages, no sewers, narrow streets, stuff like that. With technology roughly equivalent to seventeenth century. But now—see there, see that building over there?"

Travis followed his pointing finger through the trees. A large white building of blinding marble was coming slowly into view. Travis' eyes widened.

"You see? Just like the blinkin' Parthenon, or Acropolis, whichever it is. All columns and frescoes. In the middle of a town looks just like London. Makes no sense, but there it is. And that's not all. Their government is Grecian too, complete with Senate and Citizens. No slaves though. Well not exactly. You couldn't call them slaves. Or could you? Heck of a question, that—" He paused to brood. Travis nudged him.

"Yes. Well, all that is minor, next to the big thing. This is one of two major countries on the planet. There's a few hill tribes but these make up about 90 percent of the population, so you have to deal with these. They never go to war, well maybe once in a while, but not very often. So no trouble there.

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The big trouble is one you'd never guess, not in a million years."

He stared at Travis unhappily.

"The whole planet's run on astrology."

He waited for a reaction. Travis said nothing.

"It aint funny," Horton said. "When I say run on astrology I mean really run. Wait'll you hear."

"I'm not laughing," Travis said. "But is that all? In this business you learn to respect the native customs, so if all we have to do—"

"I ain't finished yet," Horton said ominously, "you don't get the point. *Everything* these people do is based on astrology. And that means business too, lad, business too. Every event that happens on this cockeyed world, from a picnic to a wedding to a company merger or a war, it's all based on astrology. They have it down so exact they even tell you when to sneeze. You ought to see the daily paper. Half of it's solid astrological guidance. All the Senators not only have astrologers, they *are* astrologers. And get this: every man and woman and child alive on this planet was catalogued the day he was born. His horoscope was drawn up by the public astrologer—a highly honored office—and his future laid out according to what the horoscope said. If his horoscope indicates a man of stature and responsibility, he *becomes,* by God, a man of stature and responsibility. You have to see it to believe it. Kids with good horoscopes are sent to the best schools, people fight to give them jobs. Well, take the courts, for example. When they're trying a case, do they talk about evidence? They do not. They call in a legal astrologer—there's all kinds of branches in the profession—and this joker all by himself determines the guilt or innocence of the accused. By checking the aspects. Take a wedding. Boy meets girl. Boy likes girl. Does boy go see girl? No. He heads straight for an astrologer. The girl's horoscope is on file in the local city hall, just like everybody else. The astrologer compares the charts and determines whether the marriage will be a good one. He is, naturally, a marital astrologer. He gives the word. If he says no they don't marry.

"I could go on for hours. But you really have to see it. Take the case of people who want to have children. They want them born, naturally, at the time of the best possible aspects, so they consult an astrologer and he gives them a list of the best times for a baby to be conceived. These times are not always convenient, sometimes it's 4:18 in the morning and sometimes it's 2:03 Monday afternoon. Yet this is a legitimate excuse for getting out of work. A man goes in, tells his boss it's breeding time, and off he goes without a penny docked. Build a better race, they say. Of course the gestation period is variable, and they never do hit it right on the nose, and also there are still the natural accidents, so

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quite a few are born with terrible horoscopes—"

"Holy smoke!" Travis muttered. The possibilities of it blossomed in his mind. He began to understand what was coming.

"Now you begin to see?" Horton went on gloomily. "Look what an Earthman represents to these people. We are the unknown, the completely capital U Unknown. Everybody else is a certain definite quantity, his horoscope is on file and every man on Mert has access to all his potentialities, be they good, bad or indifferent. But not us. They don't know when we were born, or where, and even if they did it it wouldn't do them any good, because they haven't got any system covering Mars and Jupiter, the planets at home. Everybody else is catalogued, but not us."

"And just because they believe so thoroughly in their own astrology they've gotten used to the idea that a man is what his horoscope says he is."

"But us? What are we? They haven't the vaguest idea, and it scares hell out of them. The only thing they can do is check with one of the branches, what they call Horary Astrology, and make a horoscope of the day we landed. Even if that tells them nothing about us in particular at least it tells them, or so they believe, all about our mission to Mert. Because the moment our ship touched the ground was the birth date of our business here."

He paused and regarded Travis with woeful sympathy.

"With us, luckily, it was all right. The Mapping Command just happened to hit here on a good day. But you? Trav, old buddy, for once you came just too damn fast—"

"Oh my God," Travis breathed. "We landed on a bad day."

"Bad?" Horton sighed. "Man, it's *terrible.*"

"You see," Horton said as they drove into the town, "not a soul on the streets. This is not ony a bad day, this is one for the books. Tomorrow, you see, there is an eclipse. And to these people there is nothing more frightening than an eclipse. During the entire week preceding one they won't do a darn thing. No business, no weddings, no anything. The height of it will be reached about tomorrow noon. Their moon—which is a tiny little thing not much bigger than our first space station—is called Felda. It is very important in their astrology. And for all practical purposes the eclipse is already in force. I knew you were riding in down the base so I checked it out. It not only applies to you, other things cinch it."

He pulled a coarse sheet of paper from his pocket and read from it in a wishful voice: "With Huck, planet of necessity, transiting the 12th house of endings and things hidden, squaring Bonken, planet of gain, in the ninth house

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of travellers and distant places, it is unquestionable that the visit of these—uh—persons bodes ill for Mert. If further proof is needed, one need only examine the position of Diomed, which is conjunct Huck, and closely square to Lyndal, in the third house of commerce, etc, etc." You see what I mean? On top of this yet an eclipse. Trav, you haven't got a prayer. If only you hadn't been so close. Two days from now would have been great. Once the eclipse ends—"

"Well, listen," Travis said desperately, "couldn't we just see the guy?"

"Take my advice. Don't. He has expressed alarm at the thought that you might come near him. Also his guards are armed with blunderbusses. They may be a riot to look at, but those boys can shoot, believe me. Give you a contract? Trav, he wouldn't give you a broom to sweep out his cellar."

At that moment they drew up before an enormous marble building vaguely reminiscent of a Theban palace. It turned out to be the local hotel. Horton stopped on the threshold and handed them two of the tiny Langkits, the little black memory banks in which the language of Mert had been transcribed for their use by the Mapping Command. Travis slipped his automatically into position behind his ear, but he felt no need to know the language. This one was going to be tough. He glanced at Dahlinger. The kid was wearing a stunned expression, too dulled even to notice the pantalooned customer—first Merts they'd seen—eyeing them fearfully from behind pillars as they passed.

Smell that gold, Travis remembered wistfully. Then, smell those generators. Oh, he thought sinkingly, smell those generators. They went silently on up to the room.

Travis stopped at the door as a thought struck him.

"Listen," he said cautiously, taking Horton by the arm, "haven't you thought of this? Why don't we just take off and start all over, orbit around for a couple of days, pick a good hour, and then come back down. That way we'll be starting all—"

But Horton was gazing at him reproachfully.

"They have a word for that, Trav," he said ominously, "they call it *vetching*. Worst crime a man can commit. Attempt to evade his stars. Equivalent almost to falsifying a horoscope. No siree, boy, for that they burn you very slowly. The first horoscope stands. All your subsequent actions, according to them, date from the original. You'll just be bearing out the first diagnosis. You'll be a vetcher."

"Um," Travis said. "If they feel that way, why the heck do they even let us stay?"

"Shows you the way the system works. This is a bad day for everything. Coming as well as going. They'd never think of asking you

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to start a trip on a day like this. No matter who you are."

Travis collapsed into an old, vaguely Chippendale chair. His position was not that of a man sitting, it was that of a man dropped from a great height.

"Well," Horton said. "So it goes. And listen, Trav, there was nothing I could do."

"Sure, Hort."

"I just want you to know I'm sorry. I know they've been kickin' you around lately, and don't think I don't feel I owe you something. After all, if you hadn't—"

"Easy," Travis said, glancing at Dahlinger. But the kid's ears perked.

"Well," Horton murmured, "just so's you know. Anyways I still got faith in you. And Unico will be in the same boat. If they get here tonight. So think about it. Let me see the old Pat Travis. Your luck has to change sometime."

He clenched a fist, then left.

Travis sat for a long while in the chair. Dahlinger muttered something very bitter about luck. Travis thought of telling him that it was not luck that had put them so close to Mert, but a very grim and expensive liaison with a ferociously ugly Mapping Command secretary at Aldebaran. She had told him that there was a ship in this area. But this news was not for Dahlinger's ears. And neither did he think it wise to explain to Dahlinger the thing he had done for Horton some years ago. Young Dolly was not yet ripe. Travis sighed and looked around for a bed. To his amusement he noted a four poster in the adjoining room. He went in and lay down.

Gradually the dullness began to wear off. There was a resiliency in Travis unequalled, some said, by spring steel. He began to ponder ways and means.

There was always a way. There had to be a way. Somewhere in the customs of this planet there was a key—but he did not have the time. Unico would be in tonight, others would be down before the week was out. And the one to land in two days, on the *good* day, would get the contract.

He twisted on the bed. Luck, luck, the hell with luck. If you were born with sense you were lucky and if a meteor fell on you, you were unlucky, but most of the rest of it was even from there on out. So if the legend was to continue . . .

He became gradually aware of the clock in the ceiling.

In the ceiling?

He stared at it. The symbols and the time meant nothing, but the clock was embedded flat in the ceiling above the bed, facing directly down.

He pondered that for a moment. Then he exploded with laughter. By jing, of course. They would have to know what time the baby was conceived. So all over Mert, in thousands of homes, there were clocks in the bedrooms, clocks in

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the ceilings, and wives peering anxiously upward murmured sweetly in their husbands' ears: 4:17, darling, 4:17 and a half . . .

The roar of his mirth brought Dolly floundering in from the other room. Travis sprang from the bed.

"Listen, son," he bellowed, "luck be damned! You get back to the ship. Get Mapping Command to let you look at its files, find out everything you can about Mert. There's a key somewhere, boy, there's an out in there someplace, if we look hard enough. Luck! Hah! Work, boy, work, there's a key!"

He shooed Dahlinger out of the room. The young man left dazedly, but he had caught some of Travis' enthusiasm. Travis turned back to the bed feeling unreasonably optimistic. No way out, eh? Well by jingo, old Pat Travis would ride again, he could feel it in his bones.

A few moments later he had another feeling in his bones. This one was much less delightful. He was pacing past a heavy drapery when something very hard and moving very fast struck him on the head.

The first thing Travis saw when he awoke was, unmistakably, the behind of a young woman.

His head was lying flat on the floor and the girl was sitting next to him, her back toward him very close to his face. He stared at it for a long while without thinking. The pain in his head was enormous, and he was not used to pain, not any kind of pain. The whiskey men drank nowadays left no hangovers, and for a normal headache there were instantaneously acting pills, so Travis on the floor was unused to pain. And though he was by nature a courageous man it took him a while to be able to think at all, much less clearly.

Eventually he realized that he was lying on a very hard floor. His arms and legs were tightly bound. He investigated the floor. It was brick. It was wet. The dark ceiling dripped water in the flickering light from some source beyond the girl. The brick, the dripping water, the girl, all combined to make it completely unbelievable. If it wasn't for the pain he would have rolled over and gone to sleep. But the pain. Yes the pain. He closed his eyes and lay still, hurting.

When he opened his eyes again he was better. By jing, this was ridiculous. Not a full day yet on Mert and in addition to his other troubles, now this. He did not feel alarmed, only downright angry. This business of the flickering light and being tied hand and foot was too impossible to be dangerous. He grunted feebly at the back of the girl.

"Ho," he said. "Now what in the sweet name of Billy H. Culpepper is this?"

The girl turned and looked down at him. She swiveled around on her hips and a rag-bound foot kicked him unconcernedly in the side. For

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the first time he saw the other two men behind her. There were two of them. The look of them was ridiculous.

The girl said something. It was a moment before he realized she was speaking in Mert, which he had to translate out of the Langkit behind his ear.

"The scourge awakes," one of the men said.

"A joy. It was my thought that in the conjunction was done perhaps murder."

"Poot. One overworries. And if death comes to this one, observe, will the money be paid? Of a surety. But this is bizarre."

"Truly bizarre," the girl nodded. Then to make her point, "also curious, unique, unusual. My thought: from what land he comes?"

"The cloth is rare," one of the men said, "observe with tight eyes the object on his wrist. A many-symboled engine—"

"*My* engine," the girl said positively. She reached down for his watch.

Travis jerked back. "Lay off there," he bawled in English, "you hipless—" The girl recoiled. He could not see her face but her tone was puzzled.

"What language is this? He speaks with liquid."

The larger of the two men arose and came over to him.

"Speak again scourge. But first empty the mouth."

Travis glared at the man's feet, which were wrapped in dirty cloth and smelt like the breezes blowing softly over fresh manure.

"Speak again? Speak again? Untie my hands, you maggoty slob, and I'll speak your bloody—" he went on at great length, but the man ignored him.

"Truly, he speaks as with a full mouth. But this is not Bilken talk."

"Nor is he, of clarity and also profundity, a hill man," the girl observed.

"Poot. Pootpoot," the young man stuttered, "the light! He is of *Them!*"

It took the other two a moment to understand what he meant, but Travis caught on immediately. May the Saints preserve us, he thought, they figured I was from Mert. He chuckled happily to himself. A natural mistake. Only one Earthman on this whole blinking planet, puts up at a good hotel, best in town, these boys put the snatch on me thinking I'm a visiting VIP, loaded, have no idea I'm just poor common trash like the rest of us Earthmen. Haw! His face split in a wide grin. He gathered his words from the Langkit and began to speak in Mert.

"Exactly, friends. With clarity one sees that you have been misled. I am not of Mert. I am from a far world, come here to deal with your Senate in peace. Untie me, then, and let us erase this sad but eraseable mistake with a good handshake all around, and a speedy farewell."

It did not have the effect he de-

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sired. The girl stepped back from him, a dark frown on her face, and the large man above him spoke mournfully.

"Where now is the ransom?"

"And the risk," the girl said. "Was not there great risk?"

"Unhappily," the tall man observed. "One risks. One should be repaid. It is in the nature of things that one is repaid."

"Well now, boys," Travis put in from the floor, "you see it yourselves. I'm flat as a—" he paused. Apparently the Merts had no word for pancake. "My pockets are—windy. No money is held therein."

"Still," the tall man mused absently, "this must have friends. On the great ships lie things of value. Doubt?"

"Not," the girl said firmly. "But I see over the hills coming a problem."

"How does it appear?"

"In the shape of disposal. See thee. Such as will come from the great ships, of value though it be, can it not be clarifiably identified by such pootian authorities as presently seek our intestines?"

"Ha!" the tall man snorted in anger. "So. Truth shapes itself."

"Will we not, then," continued the girl, "risk sunlight on our intestines in pursuing this affair?"

"We will," the young man spoke up emphatically. "We will of inevitability. Navel. Our risk is unpaid. So passes the cloud."

"But in freedom for this," the girl warily indicated Travis, "lies risk in great measure. Which way lie his ribs? Can we with profit slice his binds? He is of Them. What coils in his head? What strikes?"

They were all silent. Travis, having caught but not deciphered most of the conversation, glanced quickly from face to face. The girl had backed out into the light and he could see her now clearly, and his mouth fell open. She was thickly coated with dirt but she was absolutely beautiful. The features were perfect, lovely, the mouth was promising and full. Under the ragged skirt and the torn sooty blouse roamed surfaces of imaginable perfection. He had difficulty getting back to the question at hand. All the while he was thinking other voices inside him were whispering. "By jing, by jing, she's absolutely . . ."

The two men were completely unlike. One was huge, from this angle he was enormous. He had what looked like a dirty scarf on his head, madonna-like, which would have been ridiculous except for the mountainous shoulders below it and the glittering knife stuck in his wide leather belt. The shaft of the knife flickered wickedly in the light. It was the only clean thing about him.

The other man was young, probably still in his teens. Curly-haired and blond and much cleaner than the other two, with a softness in his face the others lacked. But in his belt he carried what appeared

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to be—what was, a well-oiled and yawning barelled blunderbuss.

So they sat for a long moment of silence. He had time to observe that what they were sitting in was in all likelihood a sewer. It ran off into darkness but there was a dim light in the distance and other voices far away, and he gathered that this was not all of the—gang—that had abducted him. But it was beginning to penetrate, now, as he began to understand their words, that they were unhappy about letting him go. He was about to argue the point when the big man stepped suddenly forward and knelt beside him. He shut out the light, Travis could not see. The last thing he heard was the big man grunting as he threw the blow, like a rooting pig.

When he awoke this time the pain had moved over to the side of his neck. There was no light at all and he lay wearily for a long while in the blackness. He had no idea how much time had passed. He could tell from the brick wet below him that he was still in the sewer, or at least some other part of it, and, considering the last turn of the conversation, he thought he could call himself lucky to be alive.

But as his strength returned so did his anger. He began to struggle with his bonds. There was still the problem of the contract. He regarded that bitterly. He could just possibly die down here, but his main worry was still the contract. Allspace would be proud of him—but Allspace might never know.

He did nothing with the bonds, which he discovered unhappily were raw leather thongs. Eventually he saw a light coming down the corridor. He saw with a thrill of real pleasure that it was the girl. The young man was tagging along behind her but the big man was absent. The girl knelt down by him and regarded him quizically.

"Do you posess pain?"

"Maiden, I possess and possess unto the limits of capacity."

"My thought is sorrow. But this passes. Consider: your blood remains wet."

Travis caught her meaning. He swore feebly.

"It was very nearly let dry," the girl said. "But solutions conjoined. It was noted at the last, even as the blade descended, that such friends as yours could no doubt barter for Mertian coin, untraceable, thus restoring your value."

"Clever, clever. Oh, clever," Travis said drily.

To his surprise, the girl blushed.

"Overgracious. Overkind. Speed thanks awry of this windy head, aim at yon Lappy"—she indicated the boy who stood smiling shyly behind her— "it was he who thought you alive, he my brother."

"Ah," Travis said. "Well, bless you, boy." He nodded at the boy, who very nearly collapsed with embarrassment. Travis wondered about this 'brother' bit. Brother in crime? The Langkit did not clarify. But

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the girl turned back on him a smile as glowing as a tiny nova. He gazed cheerfully back.

"Tude and the others sit now composing your note. A matter of weight, confounded in darkness." She lowered her eyes becomingly. "Few of us," she apologized, "have facility in letters."

"A ransom note," Travis growled. "Great Gods and Little—Tude? Who is Tude?"

"The large man who, admittedly hastening before the horse, did plant pain in your head."

"Ah," Travis said, smiling grimly. "We shall presently plow his field—"

"Ho!" the girl cried; agitated. "Speak not in darkness. Tude extends both north and south, a man of dimension as well as choler. He boasts Fors in the tenth in good aspect to Bonken, giving prowess at combat, and Lyndal in the fourth bespeaks a fair ending. Avoid, odd man, foreordained disaster."

In his urge to say a great many things Travis stammered. The girl laid a cool grimy hand lightly on his arm and tried to soothe him.

"With passivity and endurance. The night shall see you free. Tude comes in close moment with the note. Quarrel not at the price, sign, and there will be a conclusion to the matter. We are not retrograde here. As we set our tongues, so lie our deeds."

"Yes, well, all right," Travis grumbled. "But there will come—all right all right. My name shall be inscribed, let your note contain what it will. But I would have speed. There are matters of gravity lying heavily ahead."

The girl cocked her head oddly to one side.

"You sit on points. A rare thing. Lies your horoscope in such confusion that you know not the drift of the coming hours?"

Travis blinked.

"Horoscope?" he said.

"Surely," the girl said, "the astrologers of your planet did preach warning to you of the danger of this day, and whether, in the motions of your system, lay success or failure. Or is it a question of varying interpretations? Did one say you good while the other—"

Travis grinned broadly. Then he sobered. It would quite logically follow that these people, primitive as they were, might not be able to conceive of a land where astrology was not Lord over all. A human trait. But he saw dangerous ground ahead. He began very cautiously and diplomatically to explain himself, saying that while astrology was practiced among his own people, it had not yet become as exact an art as it was on Mert, and only a few had as yet learned to trust it.

The effect on the girl was startling. She seemed for a moment actually terrified when it was finally made clear to her. She abruptly retreated into a corner with her brother and mumbled low frantic sounds. Travis grinned to himself but kept his face stoically calm.

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But now the girl was out in the light and he could examine her clearly for the first time, and he forgot about astrology entirely.

She was probably in her early twenties. She was dirtier than a well-digger's shoes. She ran with a pack of cutthroats and thieves in what was undoubtedly the lowest possible level of Mertian society. But there was something about her, something Travis responded to very strongly, which he could not define. Possibly something about the set of her hair, which was dark and very long, or perhaps in the mouth —yes the mouth, now observe the mouth—and also maybe in the figure . . . But he could not puzzle it out. A girl from the gutter. But —perhaps that was it, there seemed to be no gutter about her. There was real grace in her movements, a definite style in the way she held her head, something gentle and very fine.

Now watch that, Travis boy, he told himself sharply, watch that. A psychological thing, certainly. She probably reminds you of a long forgotten view of your mother.

The girl arose and came back, followed this time by the young man. She had become suddenly and intensely interested in his world—she had apparently taken it for granted that it was exactly like hers, only with space ships—and Travis obliged her by giving a brief sketch of selected subjects: speeds, wonders, what women wore, and so on. Gradually he worked the conversation back around to her, and she began to tell him about herself.

Her name was, euphonically, Navel. This was not particularly startling to Travis. Navel is a pretty word and the people of Mert had chosen another, uglier sound for use when they meant 'belly button,' which was their right. Travis accepted it, and then listened to her story.

She had not always been a criminal, run with the sewer packs. She had come, as a matter of proud record, from an extremely well-to-do family which featured two Senators, one Horary Astrologer, and a mercantile tycoon—which accounted, Travis thought, for her air of breeding. The great tragedy of her life, however, the thing that had brought her to her present pass, was her abysmally foul horoscope. She had not been a planned baby. Her parents felt great guilt about it, but the deed was done and there was no help for it. She had been born with Huck retrograde in the tenth house, opposing Fors retrograde in the fourth, and so on, and so on, so that even the most amateur astrologer could see right at her birth that she was born for no good, destined for some shameful end.

She told about it with an air of resigned cheerfulness, saying that after all her parents had really done more than could be expected of them. Both with her and her similarly accidental brother Lappy

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—now *there,* Travis thought, was a careless couple—whose horoscope, she said dolefully, was even worse than her own. The parents had sent her off to school up through the first few years, and had given her a handsome dowry when they disowned her, and they did the same with Lappy a few years later.

But Navel held no bitterness. She was a girl born inevitably for trouble—her horoscope forecast that she would be a shame to her parents, would spend much of her life in obscure, dangerous places, and would reflect no credit on anyone who befriended her. So, for a child like this, what reasonable citizen would waste time and money and love, when it was certain beforehand that the child grown up would be as likely as not to end up a murderess? No, the schools were reserved for the children of promise, as were the jobs and the parties and the respect later on. The only logical course, the habitual custom, was for the parents to disown their evilly aspected children, hoping only that such tragedies as lay in the future would not be too severe, and at least would not be connected with the family name.

And Navel was not bitter. But there was only one place for her, following her exile from her parents' home. A career in business was of course impossible. Prospective employers took one look at your horoscope and—zoom, the door. The only work she could find was menial in the extreme—dishwashing, street cleaning, and so on. So she turned, and Lappy turned, as thousands of their ill-starred kind had turned before them for generations, to the wild gangs of the sewers.

And it was not nearly so bad as it might have seemed. The sewer gangs were composed of thousands of people just like herself, homeless, cast out, and they came from all levels of society to found a society of their own. They offered each other what none of them could have found anywhere else on Mert: appreciation, companionship, and even if life in the sewers was filthy, it was also tolerable, and many even married and had children—the luckiest of whom quickly disowned their parents and were adopted by wealthy families.

But the thing which impressed Travis most of all was that none of these people were bitter at their fate. Navel could not recall ever hearing of any organized attempt at rebellion. Indeed, most of the sewer people believed more strongly in the astrology of Mert than did the business men on the outside. For each day every one of them could look at the dirt of himself, at the disease of his surroundings, and could see that the message of his horoscope was true: he was born to no good end. And since it had been drummed into these people from their earliest childhood that only the worst could be expected of them, they gave in, quite

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humanly, to the predictions, and went philosophically forth to live up to them. They watched the daily horoscopes intently for the Bad Days, realizing that what was bad for the normal people must be a field day for themselves, and they issued out of the sewers periodically on binges of robbery, kidnapping, and worse. In this way they lived up to the promise of their stars, fulfilled themselves, and also managed to eat. And few if any ever questioned the justice of their position.

Travis sat listening, stunned. For a long while the contract and how to get out of here and all the rest of it was forgotten. He sat watching the girl and her shy brother as they spoke self-consciously to him, and began to understand what they must be feeling. Travis was from outside the sewers, he had stayed at the grand hotel—his horoscope, whether he believed it or not, must be very fine. And so they did him unconscious homage, much in the manner of low caste Hindus speaking to a Bramin. It was unnerving.

Gradually the boy Lappy began to speak also, and Travis realized with surprise that the boy was in many ways remarkable. As Navel's brother—Navel, Travis gathered with a twinge of deep regret, was the big Tude's 'friend', and Tude was the leader of this particular gang—young Lappy had a restful position. He was kept out of most of the rough work and allowed to pursue what he shamelessly called his 'studies', and he guessed proudly that he must have stolen nearly every book in the Consul's library. His particular hobbies, it turned out, were math and physics. He had a startling command of both, and some of the questions he asked Travis were embarrassing. But the boy was leaning forward, breathlessly drinking in the answers, when Tude came back.

The big man loomed over them suddenly on his quiet rag-bound feet, frightening the boy and causing the girl to flinch. He made a number of singularly impolite remarks, but Travis said nothing and bided his time. He regarded the big man with patient joy, considering with delight such bloodthirsty effects as judo could produce on this one—Fors and Bonken be damned—if they ever untied his hands.

Eventually, unable to get a rise out of him, the big man shoved a paper down before his nose and told him to sign it. He pulled out that wickedly clean knife and freed Travis' hand just enough for him to move his wrist. Hoping for the best, Travis signed. Tude chuckled, said something nastily to the girl, the girl said something chilling in return, and the big man cuffed her playfully on the shoulder. Then he lumbered away.

Travis sat glaring after him. The contract, the need to escape flooded back into his mind. The eclipse might be ending even now. Unico would already be here, probably one or two others as well. And this

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ransom business might take a week. He swore to himself. Pat Travis, the terror of the skies, held captive by a bunch of third rate musical comedy pirates while millions lay in wait in the city above. And oh my Lord, he thought, stricken, what will people say when they hear—he had to get out.

He glanced cautiously at the girl and the boy, who were gazing at him ingenuously. He saw instantly that the way, if there was a way, lay through them. But the plan had not yet formed when the boy leaned forward and spoke.

"I have an odd thing in my head," Lappy said bashfully, "that nevertheless radiates joy to my mind. In my reading I have seen things leap together from many books, forming a whole; and the whole is rare. Can you, in your wisdom, confirm or deny what I have seen? It is this—"

He spoke a short series of sentences. Navel tried to shush him, embarrassed, but he doggedly went on. And Travis, stricken, found himself suddenly paying close attention.

For the words Lappy said, with minor variations, were Isaac Newton's Laws of Motion.

"There are the seven planets," Navel was saying gravely, "and the two lights—that is, the sun and the moon. The first planet, that nearest the sun, is called Rym. Rym is the planet of intellect, of the ordinary mind. Second is Lyndal, the planet of love, beauty, parties, marriage, and things of a gentle nature. Third is Fors, planet of action, strife. Fourth is Bonken, planet of beneficence, of gain, money, health. Next comes Huck, orb of necessity, the Greater Infortune, which brings men most trouble of all. Then Weepen, planet of illusion, of dreamers and poets and, poorly aspected, liars and cheats. And finally there is Sharb, planet of genius, of sudden cataclysms."

"I see," Travis murmured.

"But it is not only these planets and their aspects which is important, it is also to be considered such houses and signs as through which these planets transit . . ."

She went on, but Travis was having difficulty following her. He could not help but return to Newton's Laws. It was incredible. Here on this backward planet, mired in an era roughly equivalent to the time of the Renaissance, an event was taking place almost exactly at the same time as it had happened, long ago, on Earth. It had been Isaac Newton, then. It was, incredibly, this frail young man named Lappy now. For unless Travis was greatly mistaken, Navel's kid brother was an authentic genius. And such a genius as comes once in a hundred years.

So, naturally, Lappy would have to come home with Travis. The boy was hardly college age as yet. Sent to school by Allspace, given a place in the great Allspace laboratories at Aldebaran, young Lappy might

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eventually make the loss of the contract at Mert seem puny in comparison to the things that head of his could produce. For Lappy was a natural resource, just as certainly as any mine on Mert, and since the advent of Earth science meant Mert would no longer be needing him, Lappy could go along with Travis and still leave him a clear conscience.

But the question still remained: how? He could not even get himself out, yet, let alone Lappy. And the girl. What about the girl?

He brooded, groping for an out. But in the meanwhile he listened while the girl outlined Mert's system of astrology. He had realized finally that the key to the business lay there. Astrology was these people's most powerful motivating force. If he could somehow turn it to his advantage— He listened to the girl. And eventually found his plan.

"Ho!" he said abruptly. Startled, the girl stared at him.

"Lightning in the brain," Travis grinned, "solutions effervesce. Attend. Of surety, are not *places* on Mert also ruled by the stars? Is it not true that towns and villages do also have horoscopes?"

Navel blinked.

"Why, see thee, it is in the nature of things, odd man, that all matter is governed by the planets. How else come explanations, for example, of natural catastrophes, fires, plagues, which affect whole cities and not others? And consider war, does not one country win, and the other lose? Of a surety different aspects obtain . . ."

"Joy then," Travis said. "But do further observe. Is it not so, in your astrology, that a man's horoscope may often conflict with that of the place wherein he dwells? Is it not so that, often, a man is promised greater success in other regions, where the ruling stars more closely and friendlily conjoin his own?"

"Your mind leaps obstacles and homes to the truth," Navel said approvingly. "Many times has it been made clear that a man's fortune lies best in places ruled by his Ascendant, as witness, for example, those who are advised to take to the sea, or to southern lands . . ."

"Intoxication!" Travis cried out happily, "then is our goal made known. Consider: from your poor natal horoscope, in this city, this land, no fortune arises. You doom yourself, with Lappy, by remaining here. But what business is this? Seek you not better times? Could you not go forth to another place, and so become people of gravity, of substance, of moment?"

The girl regarded for a moment, puzzled, then caught his point and shook her head sadly.

"Odd man, without profit. You misconstrue. Such as we, my brother and I, are not condemned by place, but by twistings of the character. My natal Huck, retrograde in the tenth, gives an untrust-

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worthy, criminous person. It would be so here, there, anywhere. My pattern is set. Such travels as you describe are for those who conflict only with place. I, and my brother, it is our sad fortune to conflict with *all.*"

"But this is the core," Travis insisted. "The conflict is with *Mert!* Consider, such travail as is yours stems from the radiations of Huck, of Weepen, of Scharb. But should you remove yourself beyond their reach, across great vastnesses of space to where other planets subtend—and in their alien radiation extinguish and nullify those of Huck—what fortune comes then? What rises, what leaps in joy?"

The girl sat speechless, staring at Travis with great soft eyes. The boy Lappy, who until that moment had been grinning happily over the news that his laws were true, suddenly understood what Travis was saying and let his mouth fall open.

But the girl sat without expression. Then, to Travis' dismay, a slow dark look of disgust came over her face.

"This," she said ominously, "this smacks of *vetching.*"

The word fell like a sudden fog. Lappy, who had begun to smile, cut it sharply off. Travis, remembering what vetching meant to these people, gathered his forces.

"Woman," he said bitingly, "you speak in offense, but with patience and kindness I heal your insult. I control my choler, but my blood flows hot, therefore fasten your tongue. Tell me not that I have overvalued you, for your brain is clear, your courage thick. Wherefore speak of vetch? What vetch is there in travel? He vetches who leaves a certainty for another certainty, who attempts to avoid his starry fate. But you go from a certain end to an end not certain at all, to places of dark mystery, of grim foreboding. It may be that you perish, or pain in the extreme, as well as gain fortune. The end is not clear. This then is not vetching. Now retreat your words, and reply to me as one does to a friend, a companion, one who seeks your good."

He sat tautly while the girl thought it out. Eventually she dropped her eyes in submission and he sighed inwardly with relief. It was accomplished. He would have to shore it up perhaps with a little elaboration, but it was accomplished.

Ten minutes later he was standing free and unbound in the passageway. It was just barely in time. Down the round dark tunnel two men came.

—

Navel stopped gingerly over the bodies and gazed at Travis with awestruck admiration.

"A rare skill," she murmured, "they did flip and gyrate as dry leaves in the wind."

"Observe then," Travis said ominously, inspecting meanwhile the long slash down his arm with which Tude had nearly gotten him.

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"and learn. And in the future receive my words with planetary respect."

"I will."

"And I," added Lappy, shaken.

"Fair. Bright. Now attend. How lies the path?"

"Through more such as these, I fear. This place in which we trouble lies at a dead end. We must proceed through great halls where many sit waiting, ere we arrive at the light."

"No other way? Think now."

"None."

Travis sighed.

"And they talk about luck. Well boy," he turned to Lappy, "give me your blunderbuss. Obtain that one's knife"—he indicated the sleeping Tude— "and let us carve our way out into the sunshine."

But as it turned out, the getting free was much easier than he had anticipated. There was only one band, the girl's own, between them and the opening, and these had fortunately just finished their evening meal when Travis stalked, black, gaunt and murderous, out of the tunnel into their large round room. Part of it was the surprise, part of it was the sudden knowledge that big Tude and the other man had already tried to stop him, but most of it was simply the look of him. He was infinitely ready. They were not, had no reason to be, and they took it automatically for granted that a man this confident must have the stars behind him. They regarded him thoughtfully as he went on by. No one moved. They were a philosophical people. When he had gone, taking the boy and girl with him, they discussed it thoroughly.

Out under the sky at last it was pitch black and the stars were shining. Travis realized that he had been in the sewer almost a full 24 hours. That meant that the eclipse was done, tomorrow would be a good day. There was not much time.

He commandeered the first carriage to come by, routing three elegantly dressed but unwarlike young men who fled in terror. He saw with relief that they thought him only another sewer rat, for if word of an Earthman robbing the local citizens ever got out there would be hell to pay, and in addition to his other troubles he could not abide that. He told Navel to head for the field where old 29 rested. Thoroughly bushed and beginning now to feel a woeful hunger, he sat back to brood.

At the ship young Trippe greeted him with haggard astonishment. He jumped forward joyfully.

"Trav! By jig, Trav, I thought we'd lost you. Old Dolly's over at the local police sta—" He stopped abruptly and stood slack-jawed as Navel and Lappy clambered fearfully through the lock. Travis glanced back. No spectators. Good.

"Now what in the sweet silly name—" Trippe began, but Travis stopped him.

"Russ, be a good kid. See if you

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can get me something to eat. Haven't had a bite in 24 hours."

"Sure, Trav, sure, only—what's with the Lower Depths here?"

"You might show them the showers," Travis grinned. "Or at least turn on the air conditioning. But listen, anything new on the contract?"

Trippe's face fell. "Not a thing. Even worse. Let me tell you. But ho, the food." He dashed off. Travis collapsed into a chair. A few moments later Trippe came back bearing food, but his eyes by now had begun to penetrate the dirt of the girl, and he stood watching her, bemused. Then suddenly he began to look happier than he had in several days. Travis told him briefly what had happened in the sewer, also about the brains of Lappy. Trippe was impressed. But he continued to regard the girl.

"Well," Travis said, munching, "fill me in on what's been going on. The eclipse come off?"

Trippe jerked. He focussed on Travis unhappily.

"Oh boy, did it come off. Wait'll you hear. Listen, you know the way it is now, I think they're going to kick *all* Earthmen off this planet. The M.C. says we may have to leave and come back a hundred years from now. Not anybody going to get a contract now."

"What happened?"

"Well, you wouldn't believe it. You have to understand these people's astrology. You know the little moon these people have—Felda, they call it—it's only a tiny thing, really only a few hundred yards wide. Well, when the Mapping Command first came by here they set down on that Moon and set up a listening post before landing, you know, the way they always do, to size up the situation through telescopes, radio, all that. Mostly they just orbit but this time they landed. God knows why. And took off again, naturally, throwing in the star drive. So today the eclipse comes off all right, but it comes off late."

He could not help smiling.

"You see what happened. A star drive is a hell of a force. It altered the orbit of the moon. Not enough to make any real difference, just a few hours a year, only minutes a day, but boy, you want to hear these people howl. And I guess you can see their point. Every movement that damn moon makes is important to them, they know where it should be to the inch. And now not only is it slightly off course, but so is every ephemeris printed on Mert. And they have them printed up, I understand, for the next thousand years. Which runs into money. We offered to pay, of course, but paying isn't going to help. It seems we've also messed up interpretations, predictions, the whole doggone philosophy. Oh it's a real ding dong. But contract? Not in a million years."

Travis sighed. That seemed to put the cap on it, all right. After

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all, when you start pushing people's moons around, where will it end? He brooded, his appetite gone. But he made a last effort.

"Did you discover anything at all we could use?"

"Nope. Not a thing. I finally figured the only thing to do was work on the astrology end of it, you know, maybe we could argue about interpretations. These people love to argue about interpretations. But no soap. It's too complicated. To learn enough even to argue would take a couple of years. And besides Unico is here, and also Randall, and they all have the same idea. Anyway, I don't think it would work. The eclipse is too definite. You can't argue the eclipse."

"Well," Travis said with approval, "you were on the right track. You did what you could. At least we got *something* out of the deal." He indicated Lappy, who was at that moment fervidly examining the interior of the viewscreen.

Trippe nodded, but his eyes were on Navel.

"By jing," he said suddenly, "your luck holds good, no matter what. I never saw the beat of it—"

"Luck?" Travis fumed, "what luck?"

"Look, Trav, what else could you call it? You fall in a sewer, you come up with Isaac Newton and a gorgeous doll. It's uncanny, that's what it is, uncanny."

Travis lapsed into wordless musing on Navel, planets, people.

Come to think of it, he thought, it *is* uncanny.

At that moment there was a pounding on the lock. Travis quickly shooed Navel and Lappy into hiding, then cautiously went to the door. He relaxed. It was Ed Horton.

"I saw you come back, Trav. Mighty glad. But I knew you'd make it. Old Pat Travis always comes through. Aint that right, Pat?"

He tottered in the doorway. Travis caught the sweet scent of strong brew. He stepped forward to help him but Horton stood up grandly, waving him away. His mouth creased in an amiable grin.

"Diomed," he announced proudly, "is a nine planet system."

After which he fell backwards out of the door.

Trav ran to the door, stared down into the dark. Horton sat upright at the foot of the ladder.

"Sall right ole buddy. Dint mean to stay. Only thought you'd like to know natural sci-yen-tiffy fack. Diomed is nine plan' system."

He rose on wobbly but cheerful legs.

"No favoritism there, hey? Science. I just tell you a fack, you take it from there. No favoritism tall."

He lurched away mumbling cheerily, his obligation fulfilled.

Travis stared after him, wheels turning in his brain. Fack? A nine planet system. It jelled slowly, then broke.

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Nine planets.

The key.

He turned slowly on Trippe, his eyes swivelling like twin dark cannon.

"What's he say?" Trippe said, half-smiling. "Boy, he was sure—"

"Did you know this was a nine planet system?"

"Why . . . sure, Trav. But what—"

"And did you take the trouble to examine their astrology?"

"Certainly. What the heck—"

"And you call it luck." Travis sighed, then broke into a radiant grin. "Why there's your bloomin' answer, you sad silly dreamin'—there's your bloomin' answer!" He sailed over to a drawer, grabbed a batch of fresh contracts, then flashed toward the door.

"Hold the fort," he bawled over his shoulder, "break out a big bottle and small glasses! We got a contract, lad, we got a contract!"

He vanished triumphantly into the night.

Old 29 was homing. Travis felt the great soft peace of deep space close over him. All was right with the world. A clean and sparkling Navel, well-bathed now and almost frighteningly beautiful, sat worshipfully at his feet dressed in a pair of Dahlinger's pajamas. Both Trippe and Dahlinger were regarding him with wonder and delight, and as he sat gazing down at them fondly he recalled with pleasure the outraged faces of the men from Unico, that robber outfit.

"Pat Travis," he chuckled, patting the fat contract in his pocket, "the luckless Pat Travis rides again." He turned an eye on the staring Trippe.

"My boy," he said paternally, "speaks me no speaks about luck, from this day forth. All the material was in your hands, there was no luck involved. All you had to do was use it."

"But Trav, I still don't get it. I've been thinkin' all night, all the while you were gone . . ."

"The planet Pluto," Travis said evenly, "was discovered by Earthmen, finally, in the year 1930. At that time we were approximately 300 years ahead, technologically, of the people of Mert. A similar case exists for Neptune, which was not discovered, although adequate telescopes had long been in use, until 1846." He paused and gazed happily around. "Does the light dawn?"

"Holy cow!"

"Exactly. Diomed is a nine planet system. For which 'fack' thank old Ed Horton, who returned a favor done many years ago. Luck? Only if doing favors for people is lucky. Which I suppose you could make a case for. But in the astrology of Diomed III—an astrology I took great pains to understand—how many planets are considered? Let us examine. Rym, Fors, Lyndal, Bonken, Huck, Weepen, and Sharb. And then there are also the two 'lights,' that is, the sun and the

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moon. But how many *planets* are there? Counting Mert as one, add them up. It comes out eight. Not nine. Eight. But Diomed is a nine planet system. Bless Ed Horton. What happened to the missing planet?"

Dahlinger whooped. "They didn't know they had one!"

Travis grinned. "With surety. They didn't know it existed. If they had their astrology would certainly have shown it. So it had obviously, like our own Pluto at a similar time, never been discovered.

He paused once again while Dahlinger and Trippe regarded him with delight.

"And you," Trippe said, "you showed them where it was."

Travis clucked. "I did not. For one thing, I didn't know where it was. I simply told him, very regretfully, that there *was* one, but the situation being what it was, I couldn't allow him to use our telescopes to plot its orbit. Unless, you see, there existed a concrete agreement between us.

"I added that I had heard that Earthmen would shortly be leaving his planet. Very unhappily I told him he could not expect to produce a telescope of the necessary power within at least the next hundred years. And even then, it would be many more years before they actually found it. I was very sorry about the whole business, so I just thought I'd drop by to offer my regrets."

"And he leaped at the chance."

"No. You rush to conclusions. He did not leap at the chance. He sat very quietly thinking about it. It was a gruesome sight. I could sympathize with him. On the one hand he had us, the unkown, moon-moving Us, with which he wanted no traffic whatever. But on the other side there was the knowledge of that planet moving all unwatched out in the black, casting down its radiations, be they harmful or good, and no way to know in what sign the thing was, or what house, or what effect it would have on him, *was having* on him, even as he sat there. Oh he struggled, but I knew I had him. He signed the contract. I think I may say, that it is among the most liberal contracts we have ever signed."

There was a long moment of silence in the ship. The young men sat grinning foolishly.

"So let me hear no more about luck," said Travis firmly. "In the future, sons, put your shoulders to the wheel . . ."

But the attention of the two was already wandering. They were both beginning to gaze once more upon the lovely Navel, who was quite shyly but very womanly gazing back. He saw Trippe look at Dahlinger, Dahlinger glare at Trippe, their hackles rising. He looked down at Navel in alarm.

Born to cause trouble?

Oh no, he thought abruptly, seeing a whole new world beginning to open up, oh no, oh no . . .

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one out of ten

by . . . J. Anthony Ferlaine

There may be a town called Mars in Montana. But little Mrs. Freda Dunny didn't come from there!

I WATCHED Don Phillips, the commercial announcer, out of the corner of my eye. The camera in front of me swung around and lined up on my set.

". . . And now, on with the show," Phillips was saying. "And here, ready to test your wits, is your quizzing quiz master, Smiling Jim Parsons."

I smiled into the camera and waited while the audience applauded. The camera tally light went on and the stage manager brought his arm down and pointed at me.

"Good afternoon," I said into the camera, "here we go again with another half hour of fun and prizes on television's newest, most exciting, game, 'Parlor Quiz.' In a moment I'll introduce you to our first contestant. But first here is a special message to you mothers . . ."

The baby powder commercial appeared on the monitor and I walked over to the next set. They had the first contestant lined up for me. I smiled and took her card from the floor man. She was a middle-aged woman with a faded print dress and old style shoes. I

Television quiz programs with an aspect of having just staged a raid on Fort Knox are very much in the news these days. Certainly the prizes to be won are astronomical and the contestants scarcely less so. Step right up, little lady and tell us why your eyes look so strange! What's that? You want us to read this astounding science fantasy documentary by J. Anthony Ferlaine first? Well—perhaps we should play it safe while the flying saucer folk are watching us!

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never saw the contestants until we were on the air. They were screened before the show by the staff. They usually tried to pick contestants who would make good show material—an odd name or occupation—or somebody with twenty kids. Something of that nature.

I looked at the card for the tip off. "Mrs. Freda Dunny," the card said. "Ask her where she comes from?"

I smiled at the contestant again and took her by the hand. The tally light went on again and I grinned into the camera.

"Well, now, we're all set to go . . . and our first contestant today is this charming little lady right here beside me. Mrs. Freda Dunny." I looked at the card. "How are you Mrs. Dunny?"

"Fine! Just fine."

"All set to answer a lot of questions and win a lot of prizes?"

"Oh, I'll win all right," said Mrs. Dunny, smiling around at the audience.

The audience tittered a bit at the remark. I looked at the card again.

"Where are you from, Mrs. Dunny?"

"Mars!" said Mrs. Dunny.

"Mars!" I laughed, anticipating the answer. "Mars, Montana? Mars, Peru?"

"No, *Mars!* Up there," she said, pointing up in the air. The planet Mars. The fourth planet out from the sun."

My assistant looked unhappy.

I smiled again, wondering what the gag was. I decided to play along.

"Well, well," I said, "all the way from Mars, eh? And how long have you been on Earth, Mrs. Dunny?"

"Oh, about thirty or forty years. I've been here nearly all my life. Came here when I was a wee bit of a girl."

"Well," I said, "you're practically an Earthwoman by now, aren't you?" The audience laughed. "Do you plan on going back someday or have you made up your mind to stay here on Earth for the rest of your days?"

"Oh, I'm just here for the invasion," said Mrs. Dunny. "When that's over I'll probably go back home again.

"The invasion?"

"Yes, the invasion of Earth. As soon as enough of us are here we'll get started."

"You mean there are others here, too?"

"Oh, yes, there are several million of us here in the United States already—and more are on the way."

"There are only about a hundred and seventy million people in the United States, Mrs. Dunny," I said. "If there are several million Martians among us, one out of every hundred would have to be a Martian."

"One out of every ten!" said Mrs. Dunny. "That's what the boss said just the other day. 'We're

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getting pretty close to the number we need to take over Earth.' "

"What do you need?" I asked, "One to one? One Martian for every Earthman?"

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Dunny, "one Martian is worth ten Earthmen. The only reason we're waiting is we don't want any trouble."

"You don't look any different from us Earth people, Mrs. Dunny. How does one tell the difference between a Martian and an Earthman when one sees one?"

"Oh, we don't *look* any different," said Mrs. Dunny. "Some of the kids don't even know they're Martians. Most mothers don't tell their children until they're grown-up. And there are other children who are never told because they just don't develop their full powers."

"What powers?"

"Oh, telepathy, thought control —that sort of thing."

"You mean that Martians can read people's thoughts?"

"Sure! It's no trouble at all. It's very easy really, once you get the hang of it."

"Can you read my mind?" I asked, smiling.

"Sure!" said Mrs. Dunny, smiling up at me. "That's why I said that I'd know the answers. I'll be able to read the answers from your mind when you look at that sheet of paper."

"Now, that's hardly sporting, is it, Mrs. Dunny?" I said, turning to the camera. The audience laughed. "Everybody else has to do it the hard way and here you are reading it from my mind."

"All's fair in love and war," said Mrs. Dunny.

"Tell me, Mrs. Dunny. Why are you telling me about all this? Isn't it supposed to be a secret?"

"I have my reasons," said Mrs. Dunny. "Nobody believes me anyhow."

"Oh, I believe you, Mrs. Dunny," I said gravely. "And now, let's see how you do on the questions. Are you ready?"

She nodded.

"Name the one and only mammal that has the ability to fly?" I asked, reading from the script.

"A bat," she said.

"Right! Did you read that from my mind?"

"Oh, yes, you're coming over very clear!" said Mrs. Dunny.

"Try this one," I said. "A princess is any daughter of a sovereign. What is a princess royal?"

"The eldest daughter of a sovereign," she said.

"Correct! How about this one? Is a Kodiak a kind of simple box camera; a type of double-bowed boat; or a type of Alaskan bear?"

"A bear," said Mrs. Dunny.

"Very good," I said. "That was a hard one." I asked her seven more questions and she got them all right. None of the other contestants even came close to her score, so I wound up giving her the gas range and a lot of other smaller prizes.

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After we were off the air I followed the audience out into the hall. Mrs. Dunny was walking towards the lobby with an old paper shopping bag under her arm. An attendant was following her with an armful of prizes.

I caught up with her before she reached the door.

"Mrs. Dunny," I said, and she turned around. "I want to talk to you."

"When do I get the gas stove?" she said.

"Your local dealer will send it to you in a few days. Did you give them your address?"

"Yes, I gave it to them. My Philadelphia address, that is. I don't even remember my address at home any more."

"Come, now, Mrs. Dunny. You don't have to keep up that Mars business now that we're off the air."

"It's the truth and I didn't come here just by accident," said Mrs. Dunny, looking over her shoulder toward the attendant who was still holding the prizes. "I came here to see you."

"Me?"

Mrs. Dunny set the paper bag down on the floor and dug down into her pocketbook. She took out a dog-eared piece of white paper and bent it up in her hand.

"Yes," she said finally. "I came to see you. And you didn't follow me out here because you wanted to. I commanded you to come."

"Commanded me to come!" I spluttered. "What for?"

"To prove something to you. Do you see this piece of paper?" She held out the paper in her hand with the blank side toward me. "My address is on this paper. I am reading the address. Concentrate on what I'm reading."

I looked at her.

I concentrated.

Suddenly, I knew.

"Two fifty-one South Eighth Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania," I said aloud.

"You see it's very easy once you get the hang of it," she said.

I nodded and smiled down at her. Now I understood. I picked up her bag and put my hand on her shoulder.

"Let's go," I said. "We have a lot to talk about."

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universe in books

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

Has this man solved the mystery of Atlantis? Is this the truth that men have searched for so long?

FOR hundreds of years—it sometimes seems as if for thousands of years—man has searched for the lost Atlantis, reputed paradise of the age before the great flood, located by some in the Sahara, by others in the South Atlantic, and confused by still others with Brendan's *Isles of the Blest.* Jurgen Spanuth, in his ATLANTIS—THE MYSTERY UNRAVELLED (Citadel, $4.00), appears to have come close to a possible answer, and this despite the fact that twenty thousand volumes have so far been published about Atlantis.

WAS Atlantis an illusion? Even Aristotle believed so, and modern writers have suggested that Atlantis was and is a legendary island, a creation of the imagination. On the other hand, and in this Spanuth is certainly correct, the acceptance of the Atlantis report in its original form as a record of historical events in the thirteenth century B.C., *a record of historical events that can be checked against extant Egyptian records,* makes invalid many, if not all, of the attempts which have been made so far to date and locate Atlantis. Historically, something whose name has

A report on a sensational new approach to the thousand-year-old question of whether Atlantis ever existed—and where! Was Atlantis later a submerged continent between Europe and the Americas? Was Col. Fawcett correct when he thought he was walking along the streets of an ancient Atlantean colony?

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come down to us as Atlantis, undoubtedly did exist; the question is WHERE!

Ovid wrote in *Metamorphoses,* obviously on the basis of earlier sources: "The earth was alight, mountains were raised, great gaps appeared, the rivers dried up; great towns vanished with all their inhabitants and enormous outbreaks of fire turned human beings into ashes."

Driven by these catastrophes at the end of the thirteenth century B.C., in the course of which Libya became a parched desert and tremendous floods and storms swept over Europe, the Atlanteans, not the golden peoples of the later legends but the storm-and-disaster driven islander-survivors, banded together to carve a new Empire out of the lands circling the Eastern Mediterranean, an effort to dominate Greece and Egypt as well as all the lands within the straits. Crossing Europe, conquering the whole of Greece except for Athens, they then invaded Asia Minor, penetrating to the border of Egypt. Libya, most of Greece, and much of Egypt as far as the Tyrrhenian Sea, joined the Atlantean campaign (the Egyptians called it the campaign of the North peoples), Egypt finally, however, checking the blitzkrieg advance of the Atlanteans and their Satellites.

The Pyrrhic victory of Pharaoh Rameses III did not end the story of these "North peoples," soon absorbed into the fabric of tenth and ninth century B.C. Asia Minor, and ruling Palestine and the Eastern Mediterranean. Again allied with the Libyans, they finally succeeded in the invasion of Egypt, Sheshonk I usurping the Egyptian throne in 946 B.C.

Spanuth makes an interesting case for the possibility that the "North peoples" may have come from the North Sea area. He feels that "the archaeological material confirms the accuracy of the Egyptian statements and certifies the origin of these people from the North Sea area. A gigantic migration from these territories towards the end of the thirteenth century B.C. is proved by archaeological research." (p. 81). Spanuth's case for the location of Atlantis off Heligoland, backed by years of researches and exploration, is a persuasively presented account which should interest the many of you who have read about — and wondered about—Atlantis. Recommended.

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there will be school tomorrow

by . . . V. E. Thiessen

There is a quiet horror to this story from Tomorrow. . . .

EVENING had begun to fall. In the cities the clamor softened along the streets, and the women made small, comfortable, rattling noises in the kitchens. Out in the country the cicadas started their singing, and the cool smell began to rise out of the earth. But everywhere, in the cities and in the country, the children were late from school.

There were a few calls, but the robotic telephone devices at the schools gave back the standard answer: "The schools are closed for the day. If you will leave a message it will be recorded for tomorrow."

The telephones between houses began to ring. "Is Johnny home from school yet?"

"No. Is Jane?"

"Not yet. I wonder what can be keeping them?"

"Something new, I guess. Oh, well, the roboteachers know best. They will be home soon."

"Yes, of course. It's foolish to worry."

The children did not come.

After a time a few cars were driven to the schools. They were met by the robots. The worried parents were escorted inside. But the children did not come home.

And then, just as alarm was be-

You will possibly shudder, but you will certainly remember for a long time, this story of what happens when Tomorrow's gently implacable teachers are faced with a problem for which there seems to be only one solution. . . .

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ginning to stir all over the land, the robots came walking, all of the robots from the grade schools, and the high schools, and the colleges. All of the school system walking, with the roboteachers saying, "Let us go into the house where you can sit down." All over the streets of the cities and the walks in the country the robots were entering houses.

"What's happened to my children?"

"If you will go inside and sit down—"

"What's happened to my children? Tell me now!"

"If you will go inside and sit down—"

Steel and electrons and wires and robotic brains were inflexible. How can you force steel to speak? All over the land the people went inside and sat nervously waiting an explanation.

There was no one out on the streets. From inside the houses came the sound of surprise and agony. After a time there was silence. The robots came out of the houses and went walking back to the schools. In the cities and in the country there was the strange and sudden silence of tragedy.

The children did not come home.

The morning before the robots walked, Johnny Malone, the Mayor's son, bounced out of bed with a burst of energy. Skinning out of his pajamas and into a pair of trousers, he hurried, barefooted, into his mother's bedroom. She was sleeping soundly, and he touched one shoulder hesitantly.

"Mother!"

The sleeping figure stirred. His mother's face, still faintly shiny with hormone cream, turned toward him. She opened her eyes. Her voice was irritated.

"What is it, Johnny?"

"Today's the day, mommy. Remember?"

"The day?" Eyebrows raised.

"The new school opens. Now we'll have roboteachers like everyone else. Will you fix my breakfast, mother?"

"Amelia will fix you something."

"Aw, Mother. Amelia's just a robot. This is a special day. And I want my daddy to help me with my arithmetic before I go. I don't want the roboteacher to think I'm dumb."

His mother frowned in deepening irritation. "Now, there's no reason why Amelia can't get your breakfast like she always does. And I doubt if it would be wise to wake your father. You know he likes to sleep in the morning. Now, you go on out of here and let me sleep."

Johnny Malone turned away, fighting himself for a moment, for he knew he was too big to cry. He walked more slowly now and entered his father's room. He had to shake his father to awaken him.

"Daddy! Wake up, Daddy!"

"What in the devil? Oh, Johnny." His father's eyes were sleepily bleak. "What in thunder do you want?"

"Today's the first day of robo-

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teachers. I can't work my arithmetic. Will you help me before I go to school?"

His father stared at him in amazement. "Just what in the devil do you think roboteachers are for? They're supposed to teach you. If you knew arithmetic we wouldn't need roboteachers."

"But the roboteachers may be angry if I don't have my lesson."

Johnny Malone's father turned on one elbow. "Listen, son," he said. "If those roboteachers give you any trouble you just tell them you're the Mayor's son. See. Now get the devil out of here. What's her name —that servorobot-Amelia will get your breakfast and get you off to school. Now suppose you beat it out of here and let me go back to sleep."

"Yes, Sir." Eyes smarting, Johnny Malone went down the stairs to the kitchen. It wasn't that his parents were different. All the kids were fed and sent to school by robots. It was just that—well today seemed sort of special. Downstairs Amelia, the roboservant placed hot cereal on the table before him. After he had forced a few bites past the tightness in his throat, Amelia checked the temperature and his clothing and let him out the door. The newest school was only a few blocks from his home, and Johnny could walk to school.

The newest school stood on the edge of this large, middlewestern city. Off to the back of the school were the towers of the town, great monolithic skyscrapers of prestressed concrete and plastic. To the front of the school the plains stretched out to meet a cloudy horizon.

A helio car swung down in front of the school. Two men and a woman got out.

"This is it, Senator." Doctor Wilson, the speaker, was with the government bureau of schools. He lifted his arm and gestured, a lean, tweed-suited man.

The second man, addressed as Senator, was bulkier, grey suited and pompous. He turned to the woman with professional deference.

"This is the last one, my dear. This is what Doctor Wilson calls the greatest milestone in man's education."

"With the establishing of this school the last human teacher is gone. Gone are all the human weaknesses, the temper fits of teachers, their ignorance and prejudices. The roboteachers are without flaw."

The woman lifted a lorgnette to her eyes. "*Haow* interesting. But after all, we've had roboteachers for years, haven't we—or have we—?" She made a vague gesture toward the school, and looked at the brown-suited man.

"Yes, of course. Years ago your women's clubs fought against roboteachers. That was before they were proven."

"I seem to recall something of that. Oh well, it doesn't matter." The lorgnette gestured idly.

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"Shall we go in?" the lean man urged.

The woman hesitated. Senator said tactfully, "After all, Doctor Wilson would like you to see his project."

The brown-suited man nodded. His face took on a sharp intensity. "We're making a great mistake. No one is interested in educating the children any more. They leave it to the robots. And they neglect the children's training at home."

The woman turned toward him with surprise in her eyes. "But really, aren't the robots the best teachers?"

"Of course they are. But confound it, we ought to be interested in what they teach and how they teach. What's happened to the old PTA? What's happened to parental discipline, what's happened to—"

He stopped suddenly and smiled, a rueful tired smile. "I suppose I'm a fanatic on this. Come on inside."

They passed through an antiseptic corridor built from dull green plastic. The brown-suited man pressed a button outside one of the classrooms. A door slid noiselessly into the hall. A robot stood before them, gesturing gently. They followed the robot into the classroom. At the head of the classroom another robot was lecturing. There were drawings on a sort of plastic blackboard. There were wire models on the desk in front of the robot. They listened for a moment, and for a moment it seemed that the woman could be intrigued in spite of herself.

"Mathematics," Doctor Wilson murmured in her ear. "Euclidean Geometry and Aristotlean reasoning. We start them young on these old schools of thought, then use Aristotle and Euclid as a point of departure for our intermediate classes in mathematics and logic."

"REAHLLY!" The lorgnette studied Doctor Wilson. "You mean there are several kinds of geometry?"

Doctor Wilson nodded. A dull flush crept into his cheeks. The Senator caught his eyes and winked. The woman moved toward the door. At the door the robot bowed.

The lorgnette waved in appreciation. "It's reahlly been most charming!"

Wilson said desperately, "If your women's clubs would just visit our schools and see this work we are carrying on . . ."

"Reahlly, I'm sure the robots are doing a marvelous job. After all, that's what they were built for."

Wilson called, "Socrates! Come here!" The robot approached from his position outside the classroom door.

"Why were you built, Socrates? Tell the lady why you were built."

A metal throat cleared, a metal voice said resonantly, "We were made to serve the children. The children are the heart of a society. As the children are raised, so will the future be assured. I will do everything for the children's good,

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this is my prime law. All other laws are secondary to the children's good."

"Thank you, Socrates. You may go."

Metal footsteps retreated. The lorgnette waved again. "Very impressive. Very efficient. And now, Senator, if we can go. We are to have tea at the women's club. Varden is reviewing his newest musical comedy."

The Senator said firmly, "Thank you, Doctor Wilson."

His smile was faintly apologetic. It seemed to say that the women's clubs had many votes, but that Wilson should understand, Wilson's own vote would be appreciated too. Wilson watched the two re-enter the helicopter and rise into the morning sunshine. He kicked the dirt with his shoe and turned to find Socrates behind him. The metallic voice spoke.

"You are tired. I suggest you go home and rest."

"I'm not tired. Why can they be so blind, so uninterested in the children?"

"It is our job to teach the children. You are tired. I suggest you go home and rest."

How can you argue with metal? What can you add to a perfect mechanism, designed for its job, and integrated with a hundred other perfect mechanisms? What can you do when a thousand schools are so perfect they have a life of their own, with no need for human guidance, and, most significant, no failures from human weakness?

Wilson stared soberly at this school, at the colossus he had helped to create. He had the feeling that it was wrong somehow, that if people would only think about it they could find that something was wrong.

"You are tired."

He nodded at Socrates. "Yes, I am tired. I will go home."

Once, on the way home, he stared back toward the school with strange unease.

Inside the school there was the ringing of a bell. The children trooped into the large play area that was enclosed in the heart of the great building. Here and there they began to form in clusters. At the centers of the clusters were the newest students, the ones that had moved here, the ones that had been in the robot schools before.

"Is it true that the roboteachers will actually spank you?"

"It's true, all right."

"You're kidding. It's only a story, like Santa Claus or Johnny Appleseed. The human teachers never spanked us here."

"The robots will spank you if you get out of line."

"My father says no robot can lay a hand on a human."

"These robots are different."

The bell began to ring again. Recess was over. The children moved toward the class room. All the children except one—Johnny Malone, husky Johnny Malone, twelve years

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old—The Mayor's son. Johnny Malone kicked at the dirt. A robot proctor approached. The metallic voice sounded.

"The ringing of the bell means that classes are resumed. You will take your place, please."

"I won't go inside."

"You will take your place, please."

"I won't. You can't make me take my place. My father is the Mayor."

The metal voice carried no feeling. "If you do not take your place you will punished."

"You can't lay a hand on me. No robot can."

The robot moved forward. Two metal hands held Johnny Malone. Johnny Malone kicked the robot's legs. It hurt his toes. "We were made to teach the children. We can do what is necessary to teach the children. I will do everything for the children's good. It is my prime law. All other laws are secondary to the children's good."

The metal arms moved. The human body bent across metal knees. A metal hand raised and fell, flat, very flat so that it would sting and the blood would come rushing, and yet there would be no bruising, no damage to the human flesh. Johnny Malone cried out in surprise. Johnny Malone wept. Johnny Malone squirmed. The metal ignored all of these. Johnny Malone was placed on his feet. He swarmed against the robot, striking it with small fists, bruising them against the solid smoothness of the robot's thighs.

"You will take your place, please."

Tears were useless. Rage was useless. Metal cannot feel. Johnny Malone, the Mayor's son, was intelligent. He took his place in the classroom.

One of the more advanced literature classes was reciting. The roboteacher said metallically,

"The weird sisters, hand in hand
Posters of the sea and land
Thus to go about, about
Thrice to thine, and Thrice to mine
And thrice again, to make up nine
Peace, the charm's wound up . . .

Hands shot into the air. The metallic voice said, "Tom?"

"That's from Shakespeare's *Macbeth.*"

"And what is its meaning?"

"The weird sisters are making a charm in the beginning of the play. They have heard the drum that announces Macbeth's coming."

"That is correct."

A new hand shot into the air. "Question, teacher. May I ask a question?"

"You may always ask a question."

"Are witches real? Do you robots know of witches? And do you know of people? Can a roboteacher understand Shakespeare?"

The thin metal voice responded. "Witches are real and unreal. Witches are a part of the reality of the mind, and the human mind is real. We roboteachers are the repository of the human mind. We

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hold all the wisdom and the knowledge and the aspirations of the human race. We hold these for you, the children, in trust. Your good is our highest law. Do you understand?"

The children nodded. The metallic voice went on. "Let us return to Macbeth for our concluding quotation. The weather, fortune, many things are implied in Macbeth's opening speech. He says, *'So foul and fair a day I have not seen.'* The paradox is both human and appropriate. One day you will understand this even more. Repeat the quotation after me, please, and try to understand it."

The childish voices lifted. *"So foul and fair a day I have not seen."*

The roboteacher stood up. "And there's the closing bell. Do not hurry away, for you are to remain here tonight. There will be a school party, a sleep-together party. We will all sleep here in the school building."

"You mean we can't go home?"

The face of the littlest girl screwed up. "I want to go home."

"You may go home tomorrow. There will be a holiday tomorrow. A party tonight and a holiday tomorrow for every school on earth."

The tears were halted for a moment. The voice was querulous. "But I want to go home now."

Johnny Malone, the Mayor's son, put one hand on the littlest girl. "Don't cry, Mary. The robots don't care if you cry or not. You can't hurt them or cry them out of anything. We'll all go home in the morning."

The robots began to bring cots and to place them in the schoolroom, row on row. The children were led out into the play quadrangle to play. One of the robots taught them a new game, and after that took them to supper served in the school's cafeteria. No other robot was left in the building, but it did not matter, because the doors were locked so that the children could not go home.

The other robots had begun to walk out into the town, and as they walked the robots walked from other schools, in other towns. All over the country, all over the towns, the robots walked to tell the people that the children would not be home from school, and do what had to be done.

In the schools, the roboteachers told stories until the children fell asleep.

Morning came. The robots were up with the sun. The children were up with the robots. There was breakfast and more stories, and now the children clustered about the robots, holding onto their arms, where they could cling, tagging and frisking along behind the robots as they went down into the town. The sun was warm, and it was early, early, and very bright from the morning sun in the streets.

They went into the Mayor's house. Johnny called, "Mom! Dad! I'm home."

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The house was silent. The robot that tended the house came gliding in answer. "Would you like breakfast, Master Malone?"

"I've had breakfast. I want my folks. Hey! Mom, Dad!"

He went into the bedroom. It was clean and empty and scrubbed.

"Where's my mother and father?"

The metal voice of the robot beside Johnny said, "I am going to live with you. You will learn as much at home as you do at school."

"Where's my mother?"

"I'm your mother."

"Where's my father?"

"I'm your father."

Johnny Malone swung. "You mean my mother and father are gone?" Tears gathered in his eyes.

Gently, gently, the metal hand pulled him against the metal body. "Your folks have gone away, Johnny. Everyone's folks have gone away. We will stay with you."

Johnny Malone ran his glance around the room.

"I might have known they were gone. The place is so clean."

All the houses were clean. The servant robots had cleaned all night. The roboteachers had checked each house before the children were brought home. The children must not be alarmed. There must be no bits of blood to frighten them.

The robot's voice said gently, "Today will be a holiday to become accustomed to the changes. There will be school tomorrow."

In this month's issue of
THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE—

NO, NOT LIKE YESTERDAY
a J. J. Malone novelet by CRAIG RICE

THE RESURRECTION OF FATHER BROWN
by G. K. CHESTERTON

THE IMPECCABLE MR. DEVEREUX
by LOUIS GOLDING

TOAST TO VICTORY
by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

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# of time and texas

by . . . William F. Nolan

Open the C. Cydwick Ohms Time Door, take but a single step, and—

"IN ONE fell swoop," declared Professor C. Cydwick Ohms, releasing a thin blue ribbon of pipe-smoke and rocking back on his heels, "—I intend to solve the greatest problem facing mankind today. Colonizing the Polar Wastes was a messy and fruitless business. And the Enforced Birth Control Program couldn't be enforced. Overpopulation still remains the thorn in our side. Gentlemen—" He paused to look each of the assembled reporters in the eye. "—there is but *one* answer."

"Mass annihilation?" quavered a cub reporter.

"Posh, boy! Certainly not!" The professor bristled. "The answer is —TIME!"

"Time?"

"Exactly," nodded Ohms. With a dramatic flourish he swept aside a red velvet drape—to reveal a tall structure of gleaming metal. "As witness!"

"Golly, what's *that* thing?" queried the cub.

"This *thing*," replied the professor acidly, "—is the C. Cydwick Ohms Time Door."

"Whillikers, a Time Machine!"

"Not so, not so. *Please*, boy! A Time Machine, in the popular

Twenty-eight-year-old William Nolan, another newcomer to the field, introduces us to the capricious Time Door of Professor C. Cydwick Ohms, guaranteed to solve the accumulated problems of the world of the year 2057.

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sense, is impossible. Wild fancy! However—" The professor tapped the dottle from his pipe. "—by a mathematically precise series of infinite calculations, I have developed the remarkable C. Cydwick Ohms Time Door. Open it, take but a single step—and, presto! The Past!"

"But, *where* in the past, Prof.?"

Ohms smiled easily down at the tense ring of faces. "Gentlemen, beyond this door lies the sprawling giant of the Southwest—enough land to absorb Earth's overflow like *that*!" He snapped his fingers. "I speak, gentlemen, of Texas, 1957!"

"What if the Texans *object?*"

"They have no choice. The Time Door is strictly a one-way passage. I saw to that. It will be utterly impossible for anyone in 1957 to reenter our world of 2057. And now —the Past awaits!"

He tossed aside his professorial robes. Under them Cydwick Ohms wore an ancient and bizarre costume: black riding boots, highly polished and trimmed in silver; wool chaps; a wide, jewel-studded belt with an immense buckle, a brightly checked shirt topped by a blazing red bandana. Briskly, he snapped a tall ten-gallon hat on his head, and stepped to the Time Door.

Gripping an ebony handle, he tugged upward. The huge metal door oiled slowly back. "Time," said Cydwick Ohms simply, gesturing toward the gray nothingness beyond the door.

The reporters and photographers surged forward, notebooks and cameras at the ready. "What if the door swings shut after you're gone?" one of them asked.

"A groundless fear, boy," assured Ohms. "I have seen to it that the Time Door can never be closed. And now—good-bye, gentlemen. Or, to use the proper colloquialism —*so long, hombres!*"

Ohms bowed from the waist, gave his ten-gallon hat a final tug, and took a single step forward.

And did *not* disappear.

He stood, blinking. Then he swore, beat upon the unyielding wall of grayness with clenched fists, and fell back, panting, to his desk.

"I've failed!" he moaned in a lost voice. "The C. Cydwick Ohms Time Door is a botch!" He buried his head in trembling hands.

The reporters and photographers began to file out.

Suddenly the professor raised his head. *"Listen!"* he warned.

A slow rumbling, muted with distance, emanated from the dense grayness of the Time Door. Faint yips and whoopings were distinct above the rumble. The sounds grew steadily—to a thousand beating drums—to a rolling sea of thunder!

Shrieking, the reporters and photographers scattered for the stairs.

Ah, another knotty problem to be solved, mused Professor Cydwick Ohms, swinging, with some difficulty, onto one of three thousand Texas steers stampeding into the laboratory.

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no hiding place

by . . . Richard R. Smith

The Earth was enveloped in atomic fire and the ship was a prize of war. But disaster may make victory mandatory.

THE SHIP LEAPED toward the stars, its engines roaring with a desperate burst of energy and its bulkheads audibly protesting the tremendous pressures.

In the control room, Emmett Corbin listened to the screech of tormental metal and shuddered. The heat was suffocating, and acrid fumes assailed his nostrils and burned his eyes until he almost cried out in pain.

Despite the agony, his gaze did not waver from the video set across the room. In the screen, Earth was a rapidly diminishing orb, charred and mottled with glowing atomic fires.

Everything, a far corner of his mind whispered. *Everything on Earth is dead!*

He was a carpenter and luckily, he had been working inside the barricades of an Army spaceport when the news came that the enemy had broken through the defense ring beyond Pluto. He had continued nailing the cedar siding on the building, knowing that if he stopped his work and waited, he would start screaming.

Turnabout may not always be fair play in the gulfs between the stars. But so destructive and malicious are the Agronians of this story that we can readily forgive Richard Smith for filling their ship with an unexpected reversal of a victory technique almost too ghastly to contemplate. We have no sympathy for them—and neither has Mr. Smith. Still, we're rather glad he decided to make human heroism the cornerstone of a most exciting tale of conflict in space.

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An MP running by the building several minutes later had shouted at him, urging him to board one of the ships on the landing field. In those last hours, they had loaded the few remaining spaceships as quickly as possible, ignoring the importance of the passengers. He reflected that many millionaires and influential politicians were now dead simply because they hadn't been close enough to the spaceports when the unexpected news came. Watching the pilots as they sat tense before the controls, he felt overcome with helplessness.

The passenger on his right was a girl—red-haired and undeniably attractive. He remembered her name. It was Gloria White, and she was the daughter of Colonel White who had led the expedition to Venus. Her father had died months before but his friends had used their influence to establish her as a secretary on the spaceport where it was assumed she would be comparatively safe.

He had seen her frequently but almost always at a distance. She had been friendly enough, but she had never exchanged more than a few casual words with him. He had often paused in his work to admire her. But now, aboard one of the last ships to leave Earth, he evaluated her only as another passenger.

The man on his left was dressed expensively. His general appearance radiated prestige although his fleshy face was filled with disbelief as if he were witnessing a fantastic nightmare.

Rinnnng! Rinnnng! Corbin's thoughts were interrupted by a clammering alarm bell declaring by its volume and insistence that the danger was still acute. *That bell will ring until the ship is destroyed,* he thought wildly. *It could very well mean that the ship will be destroyed!*

The pilots leaped away from the controls as if they had abruptly become white hot. *"Rocket,"* one of them screamed. "Enemy rocket on our tail!"

Corbin turned suddenly and ran across the room in sudden, blind panic. "We can't shake it! Nobody can shake one!" Mumbling incoherently, he grabbed a spacesuit and began to don it.

The room was suddenly a seething mass of confusion. The pilots distributed spacesuits and helped passengers into them while the cabin continued to sway and lurch. Fear-crazed passengers ran aimlessly in circles. Some fainted and others were shocked into immobility.

Emmett had barely finished securing his helmet when the ship shook violently and he was knocked to the floor. The lights fluttered, then went out.

When the trembling at last subsided, he struggled to his feet and looked about the room. His eyes gradually adjusted to the faint light from the luminous paint on the walls and he was able to make

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out two shadowy figures moving hesitantly about the wreckage.

He remained motionless as one of the two men approached him, reached out and adjusted the dials on his spacesuit controls. The earphones in his helmet blared with a familiar voice, "Are you all right?"

"Y-Yeah. Just a little shaken."

The man walked toward the third passenger and presently Emmett heard a quick, sobbing breath through the earphones.

"Are you hurt?" the man asked.

"No." Even under the abnormal conditions Gloria White's calm voice came through clearly.

They wandered aimlessly about the room, each engrossed in his private mental turmoil. Finally the pilot broke the silence, "Since we're probably the last ones alive on the ship, we should know each other. My name is George Hartman."

"Emmett Corbin."

"Gloria . . . Gloria White."

The pilot said with grim urgency: "We've got to do something. There's no sense in just standing here—waiting for the enemy to come."

"Come?" Emmett inquired. "You mean that the Agronians will actually board our ship?"

"They always examine disabled ships. They are determined to learn as much as they can about us."

"Well, let's get some weapons and be ready. I'm no hero, understand. But I agree with you that there's no sense in just waiting."

The pilot said: "There are no hand weapons on the ship. Our only possible course of action would be to *hide.*" His emphasis conveyed to the others how much he disliked the thought.

"But where?" Gloria asked. "If they make a thorough search—"

"We can't hide *in* the ship," George said, with absolute conviction. "Our reports indicate that they examine every square foot inside a bombed vessel. We'll have to conceal ourselves outside."

"Outside?"

"We can use the magnetic shoes on our spacesuits to walk on the ship's hull. If luck favors us they may never even think of searching the forward section of the hull."

Emmett shrugged his shoulders, not realizing that in the faint light no one could see the gesture. Gloria said, "It's better than making no attempt at all to save ourselves."

George led the way from the control room, and across a passenger compartment that was filled with the crumpled, lifeless forms of almost a hundred men and women.

"There were no spacesuits in this room," he explained simply.

They operated the air lock by utilizing the emergency manual controls, and were soon standing on the hull of the ship. For several seconds they remained motionless and silent, grimly surveying their awesome surroundings. The bil-

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lions of stars above were terrifyingly vivid against the dark emptiness of space. The ship's hull was fantastically twisted and pitted, and the enemy ship—it hovered a few miles distant—had been transformed into a brilliantly burning star by the reflected sunlight.

"We've got to find cover," George said quickly. "If they're watching the ship with telescopes we'll stand out like fireflies in a dark room!"

Cautiously sliding their feet across the hull, Gloria and Emmett followed the pilot. Presently he pointed to a spot where a large section of the hull had been twisted back upon itself, forming a deep pocket. "This should be good enough," he said.

They followed his example as he knelt and crawled through the small opening. To Emmett it was like crawling into a sardine can. The space was barely large enough to accommodate the three of them, and through the spacesuit's tough fabric, he could feel faint, shifting pressures that indicated he was leaning against someone's back and sitting on someone's legs. They shuffled about in the total darkness until they reached a fairly comfortable position and then crouched in silence until light flashed all about them.

"Look!" Gloria whispered. Emmett stared through a narrow gash in the metal near his head and saw a group of Agronians approaching the ship. The starlight, glittering on their strange spacesuits, transformed them into weird apparitions.

Emmett closed his eyes and breathed a silent prayer. When he opened them again he could see only the unwinking stars and the enemy ship, which was still hovering nearby like a huge glaring eye.

"They're inside the ship analyzing our navigational instruments," George said as if he could somehow see through the solid metal. "They're a very thorough race. They probably know far more about us than we know about them."

"What are we going to do?" Gloria asked. "We can't just sit here until breathing becomes a torment—"

"What *can* we do? There's no place to go!" Emmett's heart had begun a furious pounding. His plight reminded him of how, in a recurrent nightmare, he had often found himself standing frozen before an oncoming truck, his legs immobile as he waited for death. He had always awakened with his heart beating furiously and his body bathed in a cold sweat, his mind filled with a sickening fear.

And now it was as if the nightmare had become a reality. He was waiting for death not in the form of a truck but in the regular *swish* of air that tickled his ears as his oxygen supply was purified and replenished. Eventually the sound would change its timbre as the purifying agents became less effi-

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cient. The faint sound was not as impressive as the sight of a truck. But he knew that in a short time it would be just as deadly. And, as in the nightmare, he was powerless . . .

A long silence followed—broken only by the *swish* of Emmett's oxygen-rejuvenating machinery. He listened intently and the *swish* grew in volume until it became a roar in his ears—a sound more thunderous than that of a thousand trucks.

"There is a place where we'd be completely safe," Gloria exclaimed, her voice suddenly loud in his ears. "I don't know how we could get there. But if a way could be found—"

"Venus?" George inquired. "The colony your father started?"

"Yes. There are only a few colonists there—not more than twenty-five. The war with the Agronians started just after the settlement was established and the government never had a chance to send out more colonists. Father showed me the approximate location—"

"The Agronians have probably destroyed the base by now," Emmet said. But his senses were tingling with new hope.

Gloria shook her head. "I don't think so. The enemy has studied the remains of our warships but there's a good chance that the information never fell into their hands."

"How do we get there? We haven't got a ship, and *we can't walk!*"

"We haven't got a ship," George agreed. "But we can try to get one."

Emmett felt suddenly cold when he realized what the pilot had in mind. "The enemy ship?" he asked.

George nodded. "During the skirmish at Arcturus, we managed to capture one of their ships and I was a member of a group that studied it. I'm sure I can fly one of their vessels, for the controls are far simpler than ours. Most of the Agronians have left their ship to study ours, and that leaves only a skeleton crew on board. We can use our spacesuit jets to cross the distance. As you can see, it isn't too far."

"And precisely what happens when we reach their ship?"

"Who knows? Maybe we'll get killed. But getting killed in a struggle for survival is better than just waiting to die."

Gloria shuddered. "It looks so cold out there. We'll get separated—hopelessly lost. I don't even know how to operate the spacesuit's rockets!"

"I don't either," Emmett admitted.

"It's simple." George carefully explained the operation of the rockets in detail and ended by instructing them, "We'll get separated on the way. But when we reach the ship, we'll try to meet at the air lock. It resembles the air lock of an Earth ship."

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Floating through space toward the enemy ship, Emmett felt overcome with an absurd sensation of freedom. Completely surrounded by billions of motionless, pin-point stars and securely hidden by the vast blackness of space, the aliens and the problem of survival seemed dream-like and unreal.

A sharp pain stabbed at his left arm and he heard a brief hissing sound. Oxygen was escaping from his spacesuit. The sound abruptly stopped when the suit automatically sealed the puncture. And yet the throbbing pain remained and he felt the wetness of blood against his flesh, seeping slowly down his leg.

A meteor! People usually visualized meteors as tons of metal hurtling through space. But there were small ones as well, and perhaps this one had been no larger than a grain of sand. He dismissed it from his mind, and after what seemed an eternity, his feet touched the hull of the enemy ship. Quickly he activated the magnetic boots.

A distant figure gestured as George's voice came loudly over the intercom system, "This way. Here's the air lock!"

You should whisper, he thought. *It would be more fitting.*

He shuffled in the indicated direction. His legs were rubbery beneath him and there was a growing tingling sensation in his left arm. It was just barely possible that he was bleeding to death. And encased as he was in the spacesuit, it would be impossible for him to treat the wound.

If they reached the colony on Venus he would receive medical attention, of course. But they must first overpower the ship's crew, and it would take approximately two hours to reach the colony. Could he hold out that long?

He didn't know.

George knelt and carefully examined the rectangular outline in the metal beneath their feet. "It's only a sort of button," he said. "It could be a device that opens the lock by means of a code sequence —or it could be a signal to notify those inside to open the lock."

"What should we do?" Gloria asked nervously.

Instead of replying, George pushed the button firmly. The section of hull beneath them instantly dropped several feet. Emmett looked up in time to see an outer air-lock panel swiftly blot out the stars.

Brief seconds later, the compartment was filled with a brilliant light and tiny nozzles in the ceiling sprayed a bluish gas about them.

Gloria leapt quickly to one side. "What's that?" she asked, in alarm.

"It's the Agronian atmosphere," George said. "Although their locks are mechanically different, the principle behind them is the same as ours."

"It's a strange looking atmosphere," Emmett remarked. The pain in his arm and the numbness that was gradually spreading

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throughout his body had relaxed his mind. He felt so physically detached from his surroundings that he could look at the fog-like gas that swirled about them with interest rather than concern.

"It's poisonous," George said. "We managed to analyze some. One breath is enough to kill a human—"

An inner door abruptly glided to one side and George leaped into the room beyond. Emmett followed as quickly as possible, although he felt sleepy and his every action seemed a study in slow motion.

Except for the level expanse of the floor, the room before them was entirely alien. The thick atmosphere swirled eerily. The control board was recognizable as such, but being adapted for tentacles instead of human hands, it appeared to be a meaningless maze of equipment. Strange, angular devices lined the walls and hung from the low ceiling on thin wires. As Emmett scanned the old artifacts, he could understand only one—a group of web-like hammocks that were obviously used by the aliens to sleep in.

Two Agronians stood before the large control board at the far side of the room. It was the first time Emmett had seen the enemy other than in pictures and the sight of the thousands of snakelike, wriggling antennae nauseated him.

George hesitated briefly and then ran toward the Agronians. Again Emmett followed the pilot's lead. One of the creatures aimed a weapon before George had crossed half the distance and Gloria's shrill scream of warning brought him up short. But before the weapon could be discharged, the other Agronian viciously flung a tentacle and sent it spinning from his companion's clasp.

George leaped at the nearest Agronian but the creature easily eluded him. He made another attempt and failed again.

The man and the alien cautiously surveyed each other.

"They're too fast for us," George admitted. His voice was filled with the bitterness of defeat and his shoulders sagged visibly.

"Do something!" Gloria screamed. "Do something before the others come back!"

Emmett glanced apprehensively at the air lock. She was right. At the moment they outnumbered the enemy, but when the others returned the Agronians could overpower them by sheer weight of number. And they could return without warning, at any instant.

"Why did one prevent the other from killing us?" George asked.

"He may have been afraid the other would miss and damage the ship," Emmett said. "Or possibly—"

"No. They're trained from birth to be soldiers. They're expert marksmen and their weapons are foolproof. They can adjust the blast from a weapon to travel any distance."

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"Why should one enemy prevent another from killing us?" Emmett repeated wonderingly. He remembered another question that had nagged at his mind: *Why had the Agronians totally destroyed Earth?* Why hadn't they eliminated Earthmen and preserved the planet for exploitation—as a colony, a military base, any one of a thousand uses?

There was only one possible answer. A race might destroy a planet if it was useless. Earthmen had discovered useless planets, planets with poisonous atmospheres. Was Earth's atmosphere poisonous to the Agronians?

One Agronian had prevented another from killing them with a viciousness and an urgency that indicated it had been a life-and-death necessity.

Why? What would happen if they were to die?

Something clicked in his mind and a startling certainty occurred to him. *Oxygen was poisonous to the Agronians!*

That was why his life had been spared. And the pilot's—and Gloria's. Their spacesuits would have been punctured and their oxygen supply would have spread with deadly rapidity throughout the room.

Without hesitation he removed his helmet and adjusted the controls of his oxygenating machine until it was discharging oxygen at maximum capacity.

With a shrill outcry the two aliens darted toward him. But a thin, ghostly vapor of oxygen spread rapidly through the fog-like atmosphere, and halted them in their tracks.

"You deserve to die," Emmett whispered.

The enemy collapsed at his feet and writhed helplessly on the floor. Their bodies quivered spasmodically and were still.

Gloria's hysterical, joyous laughter rang in his ears like triumphant bells and through the Agronian atmosphere that burned his face and smarted his eyes he dimly saw George's image as he rushed to the control board. He held his breath but realized that his death was certain. He could never hold his breath long enough to replace the helmet and wait for the purifying agents to cleanse the poison that now filled his spacesuit.

When he could hold his breath no longer, he inhaled quickly and deeply.

It was like inhaling a warm, comforting darkness. . . .

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—Continued from other side

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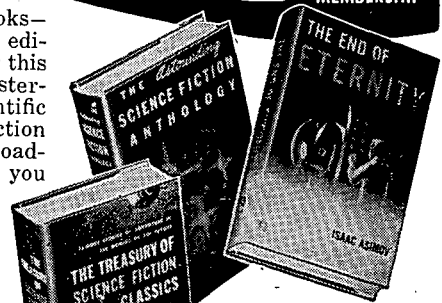

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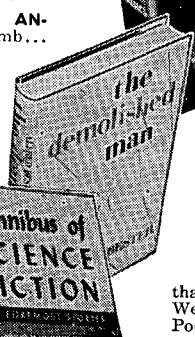

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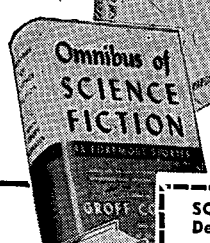

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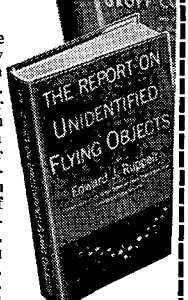

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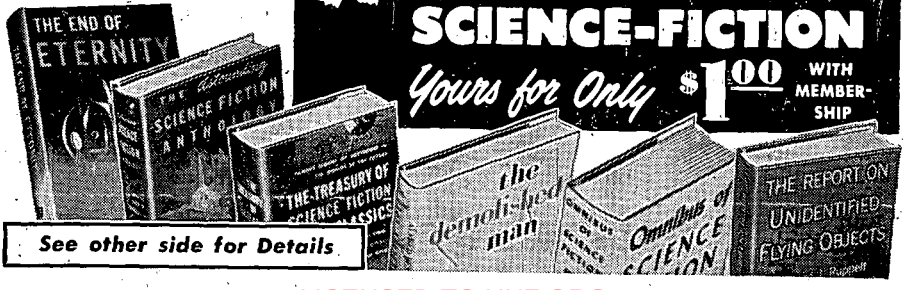
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